



# Child of Conflict

The Korean-American  
Relationship, 1943–1953

*Edited by Bruce Cumings*



# **Child of Conflict**

## **The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953**

*Edited by Bruce Cumings*

This collection of essays is the first volume based entirely on recently declassified archival materials relating to U.S. policy toward Korea in the early post-war period. Departing from accepted interpretations of events, the eleven historians and political scientists here present highly stimulating views on a wide range of issues surrounding the Korean War.

Mark Paul's article is perhaps the most authoritative study of how the division of Korea occurred in August 1945. A treatment of the guerilla movement in South Korea during the late forties is given by John Merrill. His essay, which is critiqued by Jon Halliday, develops a new argument on the internal origins of the Korean War. James I. Matray analyzes U.S. policy in Korea as a test case of containment and suggests that Korea became far more important to the Truman administration's overall approach to Asia than was previously believed. William Stueck reconstructs the process that led to the crucial decision to march north of the thirty-eighth parallel and John Kotch discusses the 1953 negotiations at Panmunjom and those resulting in the U.S.-Korea Mutual Defense Treaty.

Barton Bernstein focuses on the lengthy negotiations to end the war, and particularly on the tactics and goals of the Truman administration. In the concluding essay, Jack Saunders, an archivist with the National Records Center, provides a thorough bibliographical guide to the extensive archives on the U.S. occupation of Korea. Bruce Cumings contributes a long introduction, commented on by Lloyd Gardner, which surveys Korean-American relations between 1943-1953. He outlines the key tenets of U.S. foreign policy during that era and argues that preventing Russian domination in the Pacific was the fundamental motive behind U.S. actions.

*Bruce Cumings* is associate professor of international studies and political science at the University of Washington. He recently won the Harry S. Truman Book Award for *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-47*.

Publications on Asia of the School of International Studies 37

**University of Washington Press**  
*Seattle and London*



*Sponsored by the Korea Program  
of the School of International Studies*

*Dedicated to  
James B. Palais*

Copyright ©1983 by the University of Washington Press  
Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book has been published with the assistance of a grant from  
the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Display art: traditional Korean folk designs  
End papers: a typical pattern for a Korean book cover

**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**  
Main entry under title:

Child of conflict.

(Publications on Asia of the School of International  
Studies, University of Washington; no. 37)

Includes index.

1. United States—Foreign relations—Korea—Addresses,  
essays, lectures. 2. Korea—Foreign relations—United  
States—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Cumings, Bruce,  
1943- . II. Series: Publications on Asia  
of the School of International Studies, University of  
Washington; v. 37.

E183.8.K6C45 1983 327.519073 82-48871  
ISBN 0-295-95995-9

# 2000

JUNG S. KIM LIBRARY

\$ 800

# CHILD OF CONFLICT

The Korean-American Relationship,  
1943-1953

Edited by

Bruce Cumings



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS

SEATTLE AND LONDON



## Contents

Preface	ix
Introduction: The Course of Korean-American Relations, 1943-1953	
<i>Bruce Cumings</i>	3
Commentary, <i>Lloyd Gardner</i>	57
Diplomacy Delayed: The Atomic Bomb and the Division of Korea, 1945	
<i>Mark Paul</i>	67
U. S. Decisions on Korean Policy, 1943-1950: Some Hypotheses	
<i>Stephen Pelz</i>	93
Internal Warfare in Korea, 1948-1950: The Local Setting of the Korean War	
<i>John Merrill</i>	133
Commentary, <i>Jon Halliday</i>	163
Korea: Test Case of Containment in Asia	
<i>James I. Matray</i>	169
The March to the Yalu: The Perspective from Washington	
<i>William Stueck</i>	195
The Origins of the American Security Commitment to Korea	
<i>John Kotch</i>	239



The Struggle over the Korean Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation? <i>Barton J. Bernstein</i>	261
Records in the National Archives Relating to Korea, 1945-1950 <i>Jack Saunders</i>	309
Contributors	327
Index	329

## Preface

IT IS A REMARKABLE PARADOX THAT A RELATIONSHIP AS LONG AND AS INTENSE as that between the United States and Korea should be so unstudied. For almost four decades the Korean peninsula has been a matter of concern to American security, thousands of Americans have been in day-to-day interaction with the political, military, and economic realities of Korea, and millions of Americans have set foot in what was, until 1945, a country perceived in the West as a "Hermit Kingdom," a backwater, or a minor appendage to the grander problems of Japan, China, or Russia. Yet in spite of such intense contact, familiarity has bred in the American mind not understanding and empathy, for the most part; the phenomenon of the Sinophile or Japanophile who bridges two cultures and creates understanding is almost unknown. In the scholarly world Korea retains its former status, a little ganglion attached to considerations of Japan or China, and there has been very little systematic work in the postwar era focusing on Korea or the peculiar problems of the close, and often conflicting Korean-American relationship.

For Koreans, however, two American landings at the port of Inch'ŏn transformed their country utterly, orienting it away from the



age-old concerns of its relationship with Japan, China, or Russia. The first landing, on September 8, 1945, inaugurated an American occupation that did not finally end until June 1949 and that had, if anything, a deeper and more lasting effect than the American occupation had on Japan. The second landing, in September 1950, defeated the most serious Korean attempt at ousting the American presence, and raised the possibility of a peninsula entirely unified and aligned with the United States. Now China was also threatened, however, and so the expansion of American influence to the Yalu River was thrown back; the pre-1950 status quo was restored, and it has remained to this day: a divided Korea, with both Koreas in their own way viewing the American problem as their cardinal concern. Events in the United States, whether a new foreign policy doctrine, a Democrat replacing a Republican in the White House, or (for South Korea) a new fad or fashion in the mass media or in scholarly circles, immediately refract their effects on Korea and Koreans. Yet for Americans events in Korea remain distant, problematic, ill-understood, or simply of no concern or moment. A South Korean president is shot by his intelligence chief, and the event is forgotten within weeks; the North Koreans change their policy on unification and American newspapers report it in a three-line blurb.

Such unconcern with the Korean-American relationship has been replicated in scholarly circles as well. Although a small cadre of specialists on Korea quietly toils away at producing an article here and a volume there, the effect has not been great. No American has yet produced a scholarly and thoroughly informed history of Korea. The best English-language survey of Korea's colonial decades appeared in 1944; the standard work on the American occupation, a book limited largely to one province, was published in 1951 and has been out of print for years.<sup>1</sup> Many have written on the South Korean political process since 1945, but this literature tends to view Korea through the lenses of the dominant and sometimes irrelevant concerns of American political science; when a revolt or a regime change occurs, it usually does so as mysteriously to our scholars as to our State Department. Studies of North Korea go on mostly within the comfortable but confining limits of an anachronistic Cold War framework. When one

1. See Andrew Grajdanzev, *Modern Korea* (New York: Institute for Pacific Relations, 1944), and E. Grante Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951). An exception to my judgment on the field would certainly be Gregory Henderson's *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), which broke much new ground on the period 1945-53, while covering the last century of Korea's history.

compares the literature of today to what we had a decade ago on Korea, of course, there is much to be thankful for. But when we compare it to that on China, Japan, or Vietnam, we quickly become aware of our plight.

This volume represents a small effort toward remedying some of these difficulties; it also in some ways reflects the difficulties of doing so. All the authors have the virtue of bringing new and interesting materials to bear on the Korean-American relationship and its problems, yet in all but one case the new materials are entirely from the American side. The wealth of recently declassified archival documentation from the 1940s and early 1950s makes possible for the first time (in my view) the writing of the history of the early postwar period in Korea. The authors have all immersed themselves deeply in such materials, distilling from them a new understanding of the origin of our involvement in that part of the world. As they liberated secret materials and new facts, they also emancipated their minds from the crusty verities of the 1950s that still dominate studies of the Korean-American relationship. But the presentations remain partial, because so much remains to be done on the Korean side of things and, of course, on the Russian and Chinese sides (although here the authors can hardly be blamed for not viewing materials that have been sealed and will be sealed for generations).

The alpha and the omega of the period here studied, unfortunately, involved either the use or the threat of atomic bombs. Mark Paul finds in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a key to understanding American diplomacy toward Korea in 1945, or rather, the lack of serious diplomacy. John Kotch shows us that President Eisenhower's purported threat to unleash atomic warfare on North Korea was much less important in getting a settlement at P'anmunjŏm than was Syngman Rhee in seeking to prevent it. My essay seeks to stretch the period a bit to find three critical shifts in American policy toward Korea from 1943 to 1953. The first shift, and the grandest, occurred a year and a half after Pearl Harbor, when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt included Korea in his plans for postwar trusteeships over former colonies. Having blessed Japanese control of Korea in 1905 (another Roosevelt did this) and never challenging it thereafter, the United States now dropped its policy of unconcern with and noninterference in Korea for an internationalist policy seeking to enmesh Korea, and the Soviets, in an American-managed postwar condominium. This policy then gave way to de facto containment in 1945 and formal containment in 1949 and 1950. The third shift occurred when the United States embarked on a rollback mission in the fall of 1950.



At each stage of American policy major elements of the Korean population in the North and South resisted it: this is perhaps the most neglected element of postwar historiography on Korea, and this is why John Merrill's article is so important. To begin with, it is the first systematic treatment of the little-known but important guerrilla conflict in South Korea; based primarily on American archival materials from the period, it demonstrates that the movement was much bigger and more long-lasting than had been thought. Second, the material illustrates the earlier point that no full treatment of the late 1940s is possible simply from the American side of things; Koreans were active, and in this case violent, in opposing American policy and continually thwarted the best laid plans of policymakers in the comfortable confines of Washington or Foggy Bottom. Third, Merrill's paper must raise the question of when the Korean War really began. With one hundred thousand dead before the shots were fired in June 1950, his argument that the war had civil rather than international origins seems persuasive; with the apparent defeat of the southern partisans in early 1950, the civil conflict became skewed toward conventional military encounter. Last, Merrill also seeks a model that explains such insurgencies, a matter that Jon Halliday takes up in his useful commentary on the Merrill paper.

The violence and disorder of the American occupation was best known to the U.S. military, not surprisingly, and they first implemented in action the policy known as containment. Yet, as James Matray and I argue, it was the State Department that was most anxious formally to apply the containment doctrine to Korea, whereas the military departments tended to be more reticent, more aware of the limits to American power in Asia. Matray makes a major contribution showing how Korea was very nearly included with Greece and Turkey in the planning of the Truman Doctrine in the spring of 1947. Few have made this case before, and indeed it runs counter to the conventional historiography on the Cold War, but Matray marshals entirely persuasive evidence to defend his position. Furthermore, close readers of Matray's essay, my own, and the interesting commentary by Lloyd Gardner, will be able to understand that in the minds of certain key State Department planners, Dean Acheson especially, containment *had* been applied to Korea in 1947; it just had not been funded properly by Congress, or backed properly by the military.

Dr. Matray probably would not agree with everything in my essay, however, and my interpretation of rollback in the fall of 1950 conflicts here and there with the essays by Stephen Pelz and William Stueck. But that is all well and good; it gives the reader something to think about. Dr. Pelz uses the new documentation to place the Korean decision within

the context of bureaucratic politics and decision-making theory, and provides a window on domestic politics that is most welcome. Dr. Stueck brings out a wealth of new material in his article, and he also demonstrates that secret documents often are as confirmatory of what we thought happened as revelatory of hidden facts.

When American rollback met Chinese rollback, with a vengeance, the Korean War was pushed back to the vicinity of the thirty-eighth parallel—where the problems began in the first place, and where they have yet to be resolved. In this sense the Korean War accomplished nothing, only a restoration of the pre-war status quo at great human cost, especially to Koreans. Yet John Kitch's essay demonstrates that the war did much for the Republic of Korea, through tempestuous negotiations no doubt, even to the point of a possible coup against Syngman Rhee, but with a final result that enmeshed South Korea in a security system that has held the peace for thirty years. Barton Bernstein analyzes just how long, tough, and usually fruitless the negotiation was that finally ended the war. These last two years—summer 1951 to summer 1953—saw a more limited war than the first year, since super-power conflict was now unlikely. Yet during this period unprecedented bloodletting and the virtual pulverization of northern Korea from the air took place—all for a bit of land here, a bit of negotiating advantage there. The last two years of the war have not been as well studied as the earlier part, and Bernstein's account must now be the definitive one.

John Saunderson's bibliographical essay caps the volume; it is the only survey available on the voluminous holdings in the National Archives on postwar Korea and American policy. Those who have used these papers will know what a great service he has done, and how much remains to be digested on the Korean-American relationship in the early postwar era.

As this preface is being written, nearly three decades after the end of the war, I am reminded of how much about the postwar Korean-American relationship remains the same. American policy remains committed to a safe, middling option: containment. This is the lesson that the Chinese and the North Koreans taught. The option of American withdrawal was briefly aired again in the late 1970s, and just as quickly dropped. Mercifully, rollback is unlikely to be tried again. Still containing communism in the North, the United States daily confronts but will never consult with the northern leadership. Perhaps it is time to revive the policy never really tried: Rooseveltian internationalism, with its emphasis on diplomacy, accommodation, and multilaterality.

The essays in this volume were originally prepared for two conferences on Korean-American relations held in Seattle in 1978 and 1980.



Both were aspects of a larger project on Korean-American relations begun at the University of Washington in 1977 and continuing to 1981, funded under two grants from the Henry Luce Foundation. The purpose of the first conference was to bring together younger scholars working on or just having completed doctoral dissertations on the subject of the project—especially scholars who have utilized the vast array of documentation on American policy toward Korea in the period from World War II through the Korean War that was declassified during the 1970s. More senior scholars were invited to the 1978 conference as discussants. The second conference dealt more directly with the Korean War, with several papers by senior scholars. The discussion at both conferences was memorable in its intensity and spiritedness; both were rare occasions when people of diverse views have at each other in the sole interest of informed intellectual exchange. Although only a portion of that commentary has been reproduced in this volume, all the authors benefited greatly from the discussion, and we would like to thank in particular Frank Baldwin, Daniel Chirot, Roger Dingman, Herbert Ellison, Lloyd Gardner, Jon Halliday, Donald Hellmann, James Kurth, Okonogi Masao, Otis Pease, Michael Robinson, Dae-sook Suh, and Robert Swartout. Special thanks are owed to James B. Palais, who has given unstintingly of his time, expertise, and intelligence throughout the project, and who, in typical fashion, debated any and all issues arising during the conferences. Dr. Palais, along with George Beckmann and Kenneth Pyle of the University of Washington, helped to obtain funding from the Henry Luce Foundation for the project and we are all in their debt.

Also deserving of thanks are David Satterwhite, who worked diligently and efficiently on various administrative details connected with the conferences, and Suhaini Azmad who typed the final manuscript. I wish to thank the School of International Studies at the University of Washington for providing its expert services. Two anonymous outside readers for the University of Washington Press also provided useful comments and criticisms. I was helped immensely by the professional editorial services of Margery Lang and Judy Robertson. It goes without saying that all responsibility for errors and for interpretations rests with the editor and the authors.

## CHILD OF CONFLICT





## Introduction: The Course of Korean-American Relations, 1943–1953

BRUCE CUMINGS

AT THE VERY EARLY POINT OF AUTUMN, 1943, LESS THAN TWO YEARS AFTER Pearl Harbor, State Department planners defined Soviet control of all Korea as a likely threat to the security of the postwar Pacific. This basic position persisted down to the decision to intervene in the Korean War in June 1950. It persisted through various policies that sought to reconcile American interest in Korean and Pacific security with the obvious limits to American power, limits that were often called to the attention of State Department officials by military planners.

The first formal Korea policy—commitment to a multilateral

---

This article represents a first effort to record the results of my research on the period from 1947 to 1950. Much remains to be done, and a fuller account will appear in the second volume of my *Origins of the Korean War*. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, December 1979, and at the Conference on the Korean War, Seattle, 1980. I would like to thank the following people for their comments on the earlier drafts: Lloyd Gardner, Roy Kim, James Kurth, Walter LaFeber, James Palais, William Stueck, and the participants in the Conference on the Korean War.



trusteeship, from late 1913 until early 1917 sought to resolve security with capability by enrolling the Soviets into a four-power consortium that the United States would dominate. Trusteeship did not work, however, because, among other reasons, American occupation forces that were rushed into Korea in the wake of Japan's defeat hammered out a de facto containment policy. Various premature "cold warriors" worked out their own policies with the State Department far from the scene, events of local origin thus skewed U.S. policy toward containment in Korea, something that nearly became established policy in early 1947, only to be put off until late 1949. The agency of delay was the move of the Korean problem to the United Nations, which seemed to be the best means of guaranteeing Korean security at a time when American power was stretched to the limits on a global scale. The period from 1947 to 1949 thus saw de facto containment garbed in internationalist clothes, as the United States sought a separatist solution in Korea under United Nations auspices; during this period the contingencies in U.S. policy toward Korea expressed themselves in classic bureaucratic fashion: a commitment to the status quo, sandwiched between an option simply to get out, and an option to go in with both feet.

When containment arrived formally in Korea policy, it did so with a "rollback" option (positive action) that added an entirely new element; pursuit of rollback eventually—in the fateful days of late 1950—blasted American policy back to an equilibrium point at containment, from which it has never diverged to this day.

#### INTERNATIONALISM, CONTAINMENT, ROLLBACK: A SKETCH

In conventional accounts of the cold war, the Roosevelt administration is identified with a naïve internationalism, the Truman administration with a realistic containment, and the Eisenhower/Dulles administration with unsettling rollback policies. FDR's globalism, exemplified by the United Nations organization and the "four policemen" (the United States, USSR, Great Britain, China) who would regulate the peace, gave way to Truman's narrower conception of containing the Soviet Union, first in Greece and Turkey (1947) and then in East Asia (1950). When the Republicans assumed power in 1953, John Foster Dulles proclaimed a new policy of "liberation," or rollback, accompanied by loud rhetoric about "positive action" against communism to replace the alleged defeatism and negativism of containment; Dulles met his deserved rebuke in 1956, when the Soviets invaded Hungary and the United States could do nothing to implement its support of rollback, thus showing the policy to have been empty.

This account of policies and people is fallacious and misleading.

Only the Truman administration pursued actual rollback policies, and only in Korea. From 1945 to 1950 American policy moved through the entire gamut, beginning with the inherited Rooseveltian globalism, narrowing to containment by early 1946, and moving into a phase of potential rollback in the summer of 1949. After the Korean War began, the opportunities of the fighting opened the way to the only implementation of rollback, and the only occupation of Communist-held real estate in the postwar era. The Korean peninsula, far from being a distant backwater, was instead the center of all this action. Close attention to the Korean case therefore goes beyond Korean-American relations: it tells a tale, if not the tale, of the cold war.

What do these terms mean? How might we conceptualize the differences between internationalism, containment, and rollback? What follows is necessarily tentative, an attempt to sketch key elements of each policy—or vision—and to highlight variation. At the boundaries the policies were not so different, merging with each other, but at the core each represented a separate vision of how to deal with the great problem of the postwar era, the vigor and strength of communism. Each had an identifiable economic, political, strategic, and ideological content, and each can be identified with different elements of state and society in the United States.

All three visions can be distinguished less as coherent ideologies than as different conceptions of states and markets in a capitalist world economy. Internationalists wanted a strong state at home, to regulate the business cycle and provide a safety net for the worst social effects of capitalism, but they wanted weak and even demilitarized states abroad to stave off protectionism and provide a third-path alternative between communism and reaction. The containment compromise, however, led to the posting of strong, if partially demilitarized industrial neomercantile states in Japan and Germany, since grand area security and economic revival seemed to demand such measures. Thus the archetypal containment liberal (Hubert Humphrey or Henry Jackson) favored Truman's foreign policy and Roosevelt's domestic policy. Rollbackers wanted the American state to be weak vis-à-vis domestic economic interests but strong against foreign economic interests. The three visions were nowhere articulated fully by their proponents, although Roosevelt came the closest to this; instead the coherence of each must be sought in theory and practice, that is, in policy and the reality of American actions.

#### *Internationalism*

FDR's internationalist vision sought to reconcile three great problems of the postwar era: the revival of the world economy, especially



its West European component; the rise to great power status of the Soviet Union; and the unraveling of colonial empires everywhere. For each problem, there was a policy combining emphasis on openness with regulation, the absence of obstacles being essential to free trade and economic revival, the regulation necessary to tame unruly nations and peoples. The Bretton Woods decisions symbolize the response to the first problem, the United Nations and general involvement of the USSR in world affairs (economic and political) symbolize the second response, and the third was a general program of trusteeships for enemy colonies and firm pressure on allied empires to lead their colonies toward gradual independence and intermeshing with the world economy. Here was a New Deal for the world: a regulated, managed free market system. It was, among the three visions, a "first-best" world from the standpoint of American economic and security interests. Without going into more detail here,<sup>1</sup> we may sketch the essentials of the vision as follows:

*Metaphor:* the open door

*Economic content:* a regulated open door, a world economy made safe for free trade, an absence of obstacles (especially protectionist barriers) to the flow of commerce, a "grand area"<sup>2</sup> encompassing the globe with the United States as a hegemon looking after the whole—the supreme regulator so disastrously absent in the 1930s.

*Political content:* a world under regulated law (the United Nations) with four regulators (the United States, USSR, England, China) looking after the peace through collective security; the practical content was exemplified by the Yalta decisions<sup>3</sup> envisioning both trade-offs for Soviet and Western security and an enmeshing of the Soviet Union in multilateral, criss-crossing ties that would hamstring its insurgent impulses (containment by embrace and envelopment); practical U.S. dominance assured by having numerous proxy-voting allies and clients in the UN and elsewhere.

*Strategic content:* the United States would look after the whole, the Allies the parts; exclusive control of territory and military bases less important than high-technology and highly maneuverable Navy, Air Force, and atomic capabilities; joint policing, with the Soviets recognized as a great power and welcomed into security arrangements.

1. Here I draw on the following sources: Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), chap. 4; Franz Schurmann, *The Logic of World Power* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), pt. 1; Robert Gilpin, *U.S. Power and the Multinational Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

2. This term is used in various deliberations of the Council on Foreign Relations during World War II. See Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), pp. 135-40.

3. See in particular Diane Clemens, *Yalta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), also Cumings, *Origins*, chap. 3.

*Ideological content:* free rein to internationalist, open-door thinking and metaphors; free trade as the (regulated) hidden hand that would bring progress everywhere and liberalize both transnational intercourse and domestic political and social structures; classic Wilsonian idealism.

*Role of the state:* within the American state, the executive branch predominates at the expense of vested interests in the State Department and elsewhere; presidential foreign policy direction; liberalization of target authoritarian states abroad; everywhere the state regulates market activity.

*Social constituency:* Eastern bankers, high-technology industries, New Dealers, liberal Democrats, Navy and Air Force (a potential coalition, aborted by FDR's death).

This sketch will please no readers in entirety, and some readers not at all. But this does get us closer than usual toward understanding an internationalist current in American politics and foreign policy that comes to the fore most clearly in times of crisis: during the Depression, during the Second World War, and then again in the 1970s, when both the Carter administration and the Trilateral Commission embraced many elements of the internationalist vision, as a response both to the neomercantile policies of Richard Nixon and to the general decline of American power on a global scale.<sup>4</sup>

### *Containment*

Containment became the de facto policy of the Truman administration in the first weeks of 1946, if not earlier. This was the time of George F. Kennan's famous "long telegram," which provided a rationale for containing Soviet expansion; secret threats to use the atomic bomb to get the Soviets out of northern Iran; and acknowledgments by Truman (albeit after the fact) that at this juncture internationalist policy toward the Soviets was decisively reversed.<sup>5</sup> A year later the Truman Doctrine formalized containment policy. Here was a second-best world, as both the Soviet Union and the United States erected political and economic barriers and blockades that made a mockery of Rooseveltian one-worldism. Instead one got two blocs, the United States organizing by far the stronger one in those (substantial) parts of the "grand area" still left to it, the Soviets attempting to create a Socialist political bloc and common market. The United States got much, but by no means all, of what the internationalist vision had promised: free trade and liberalization throughout the capitalist realm, once Japan and West Germany were revived. But neither could be

4. See Mary Kaldor, *The Disintegrating West* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); also Bruce Cumings, "Chinatown: Foreign Policy and Elite Realignment," in *The Hidden Election: Politics and Economics in the 1980 Campaign*, ed. Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. 196-231.

5. Cumings, *Origins*, pp. 225-27.



trusted with first-rank military power, and so bulwarks of defense had to be created, usually with American military force. Containment was a compromise, an "option B" between internationalism and the positive nationalism of rollback. Therefore many of FDR's followers, chastened by Soviet provocation, retreated and joined Republican internationalists (Senator Vandenberg, Dulles) in a domestic coalition behind Truman's policies. The containment sketch looks like this:

*Metaphor:* bulwarks

*Economic content:* a second-best world of blocs, but with open systems outside Socialist boundaries and the potential for reintegrating selected Socialist states in the capitalist world economy; military expenses to maintain containment bulwarks primed economic pumps; economic aid to states on the containment periphery would bolster grand area economy and security; Japan and West Germany posted as neomercantile states in a free trade international system.<sup>6</sup>

*Political content:* the United Nations became a U.S. instrument, and collective security came to mean American policing; Yalta assumptions gave way to Riga assumptions regarding USSR;<sup>7</sup> assumption of Soviet aggression as akin to a mechanical wind-up car (Kennan's metaphor) led to construction of bulwarks along containment periphery, thus reinforcing state structures in Iran, South Korea, Taiwan, and elsewhere; counterrevolution in Vietnam, Korea, Guatemala.

*Strategic content:* United States looks after the whole and the parts; exclusive control of territory and bases, with ground forces added to naval and air force components, necessitating huge defense budgets and transfer payments to maintain a far-flung empire; allies corralled and disciplined by Soviet threat and U.S. military presence in Germany, Japan, South Korea; various alliance systems dominated by United States.

*Ideological content:* anticommunism but muted nationalism; realpolitik practice with idealist rhetoric; sacrifice of means to ends; progressivism giving way to freedom and democracy as code words for anticommunism.

*Role of the state:* executive branch dominant at the inception (Acheson present at the creation), but giving way to vested interests in the national security state; coalition of armed services after NSC 68 and big budgets; development of a Schumpeterian perpetual motion machine leading to permanent empire; abroad, alliance with authoritarian anti-Communist elements with legitimation provided by periodic human rights salvos and campaigns—the weaker and liberalized states envisioned by FDR gave way to bulwarks, the great metaphor of containment.

*Social constituency:* initially unstable containment compromise gave way to stable coalition between Democratic and Republican middle (lasting until 1970 or so), after boundaries of consensus redrawn by failed rollback and McCarthyism; Rockefeller Republican wing joined with liberal Democrats in foreign policy; internationalists (bankers, advanced industries) got most of what they wanted;

6. Charles S. Maier, "The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II," in *Between Power and Plenty*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 44-46.

7. The Yalta/Riga dichotomy used by Daniel Yergin parallels my internationalist/containment dichotomy. See his *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 17-68.

national industries, midwestern grain interests, and declining industries less satisfied with containment than internationalists, but conflict muted during long revival of Japan and West Germany; Dulles trades rollback rhetoric for containment policy.

Containment was thus a compromise policy that established foreign and domestic alliances that were relatively stable after the early 1950s crisis, and during the long period of American hegemony lasting until the Nixon administration. Pleasing no one in entirety, it gave everyone something of what they wanted and therefore persisted longer than internationalism or rollback.

### *Rollback*

Rollback was the preferred strategy of those elements wholly dissatisfied with internationalism and partially dissatisfied with containment; it got its strongest voicing in the early 1950s<sup>8</sup> but its only actual implementation in 1950. Since it barely existed in both theory and practice, unlike the other two visions, it is the hardest to sketch satisfactorily. A world free of communism was its ideal, leading to compromises on other fronts. Thus, where regulated free market New Dealers and internationalists would flirt with and tend toward socialism (witness Keynes), 1950s rollbackers and 1930s isolationists would do the same in regard to fascism and authoritarian regimes of the right. An undercurrent in American politics visible mostly as rhetoric, its heartland was the oil belt and sun belt and the right wing of the Republican party. Its stalwarts were industrialists like Robert Wood and H. L. Hunt, politicians like William Knowland, and political groups like the John Birch Society. Richard Nixon gave this current voice in the 1950s, as did Dulles, but both were opportunists who in fact moved fluidly through all three visions during their careers. The hero of this current was Douglas MacArthur, but he lacked organic ties with its constituency and functioned as a party of one, explaining in part the failure of rollback. The sketch looks like this:

*Metaphor:* positive action

*Economic content:* classic, not Wilsonian, imperialism—territorial instead of nonterritorial, envisioning expansion by agglomeration and direct control rather than indirection; raw materials and markets grasped exclusively if necessary, instead of a Rooseveltian organization of great spaces for free trade for all; opposition to

8. See for example James Burnham, *Containment or Liberation?* (New York: John Day, 1953), p. 31: "At most, containment can be a temporary expedient, a transition. As the transition is completed, containment must move towards one or the other of the two major poles, towards appeasement or liberation." For the domestic constituency of rollback (and McCarthyism), see Immanuel Wallerstein, "McCarthyism and the Conservatives," M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1954. I am indebted to Professor Wallerstein for providing me with a copy of his thesis.



competition from a revived Japan and Germany; fundamentally neomercantilist in its conception of relations between states, but opposed to state regulation of markets at home.

*Political content:* opposition to the United Nations and collective security; Yalta was treason and Riga axioms represented compromise, since Riga view emphasized Russian expansionism rather than global Communist conspiracy; Soviets were not functioning mechanically but diabolically; construction of bulwarks was means to an end (rollback), not the end in itself; counterrevolution extended from Socialist periphery to Socialist heartland; anticommunism by whatever means necessary meant support for reaction everywhere (Chiang K'ai-shek, Trujillo, Syngman Rhee, et al.).

*Strategic content:* Asia first rather than Europe first; away from old-world and immoral diplomacy, toward moral and new world imperialism; exclusive control of territories and bases and full military mobilization as means and not ends; fascination with high-technology weaponry for obliterating communism, therefore use of atomic weaponry and Air Force (here enters Curtis LeMay); allies disciplined and if recalcitrant or weak, abandoned for fortress America.

*Ideological content:* rampant American nationalism, chauvinism, patriotism, and high (if specifically American) moral content; eruptive anticommunism; idealist in rhetoric, but a non-Wilsonian idealism resting on entrepreneurial virtues and a restless search for markets and raw materials.

*Role of the state:* strong military and weak regulation of the economy; war capitalism if necessary, vast reinforcement of military branches in the meantime; heroic executive, gutted State Department.

*Social constituency:* military bureaucracies and defense industries, declining industries such as textiles, national industries such as independent oil (e.g. Hunt Oil), and steel and automobiles if and when they are threatened by foreign competition; grain-belt interests seeking foreign markets, especially Asian markets in the 1940s and 1950s; Republican party right wing, especially southern and sun belt constituencies that resent Eastern establishment dominance, Rockefeller wing, and big Eastern banks that control and provision credit; small and medium businesses and farms hurt by multinational corporations.

Americans are not an ideological people, or more properly, the Hartzian<sup>9</sup> consensus is so deep that alternative visions only arise to be

9. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1955). In Hartz's terms, internationalism reflects the liberal impulse to transform the world in the American image; isolationism the liberal impulse to withdraw from a recalcitrant world; rollback, drawing upon the 1930s isolationist currents in the transformed circumstances of the 1950s, represents a reaction against both, caused by the perception of the Communist threat as diabolical, and yet sharing with the isolationists of the thirties a general lack of real interest in or connection with the world. This was reflected in a habitual propensity toward a self-protective withdrawal in the face of internationalist or containment-liberal dominance of U.S. foreign policy. The lack of realism of rollback policies and the preference for losing gloriously (MacArthur) rather than winning shrewdly also reflects the typical lack of interest in the world at large of these quintessential American nationalists. It remains true, however, that all three visions derive from a fundamental ideological agreement that no one has ever analyzed better than Louis

witnessed in times of crisis. Therefore the three sketches will please no one. Instead they are approximations that simply seek to explain more of the variance in American foreign policy than do other conceptions, especially conventional ones that take neither Rooseveltian one-worldism nor rollback currents seriously. To some extent these three visions may even be mythical: but that does not invalidate the hypothesis that people acted on the assumptions. Myths, visions, and ideologies mingle together in the real world, as they influence history. Since 1945 policy has fluctuated around a consensual mid-point fashioned by sharp political conflict among these three currents. Internationalism on the "left" and rollback on the "right" have pushed the "middle" (usually meaning containment) in one direction or another; we know this when we think of the consensual mid-point of policy in 1945 and compare it to 1952: what a difference! And we know it when we witness the cacaphony of policies in the 1970s, as the cold war seemed to begin again just as it seemed to be ending, and with no administration capable of mustering a foreign policy consensus that could be compared to that of the postwar years.<sup>10</sup> By the early 1980s, such policy confusion had come to the point that most of the cardinal assumptions of the postwar settlement have been called into question: the alliance with West Europe, the combination vice/virtue of a strong economy but weak military in Japan; even the old Europe-first versus Asia-first debate has come to the fore again. So, even though the three categories are not tidy and much remains to be said, these are important currents in American foreign policy and the particular experience of Korea policy, to which we now turn, helps to explain how the containment compromise was finally won.

#### FROM INTERNATIONALISM TO CONTAINMENT IN KOREA

The internationalist position on colonies developed during the war, as a means of resolving the postwar status of colonies then under Axis control: Italian colonies in Africa, Japanese-held French colonies in Indochina, and Korea. The method was multilateral trusteeship, a preeminently Rooseveltian idea in being opposed to unilateral control of the colonies, nonterritorial, and hopeful of channeling and containing revolutionary nationalism rather than opposing it frontally. In regions where the Soviet Union was likely to be involved, such internationalism was not anti-Communist in a direct and frontal sense, seeking instead to embrace the Soviet Union in a host of multilateral arrangements that would give it responsibility for the peace, but hamstring it and render manageable its insurgent impulses. In its trusteeship

10. Cumings, "Foreign Policy and Elite Realignment."



incarnation, internationalism had a shrewd policy aimed at ending unilateral colonialism (until 1945 the policy was directed at European colonialism as well, hoping to open their colonies to American influence and commerce) and preventing the emergence of revolutionary nationalism. For Korea, the end of the war would likely bring both an end to colonialism and an opening to Soviet-supported revolution. From 1943 to 1945 Roosevelt dominated and defined Korea policy, pushing the trusteeship idea on Eden in March 1943 (Eden didn't like it), Stalin at Tehran (Stalin was amused), Churchill at Yalta (prompting one of Churchill's blustery statements about the sanctity of the British Empire), and various State Department officials who often found out about the trusteeship idea and Korea policy in the aftermath of a Big Three or Big Four conference.<sup>11</sup> At Cairo, in December 1943, the idea led to the first Great Power pledge of Korean independence since its annexation by Japan in 1910, with the trusteeship notion showing up in the proviso, independence "in due course."

Such internationalist policy required a deft touch and confident assurance that the United States would likely dominate any sort of multilateral security arrangement after the war ended. This was a policy for the whole. Other people, however, had to look after the parts of American policy, and lacked Roosevelt's confidence about the postwar world or his easy assurance that he could handle the Soviets. On Korea, these would be various middle-level officials in the State Department's Far Eastern office: Hugh Borton, John Carter Vincent, H. Merrell Benninghoff, and from time to time Alger Hiss. They sought to give practical meaning to the trusteeship policy, and to define what U.S. interests in Korea might be when the war ended. In doing so they very early enunciated certain themes and assumptions that would prove to be quite consistent, indeed to define the State Department's position on Korea for years. Stated succinctly, the position was that a Korea wholly in Soviet hands would be a threat to the security of the postwar Pacific, and therefore a threat to American security. Roosevelt may or may not have agreed; there is no record of his position on Korea in Pacific security. Other principles were in consonance with Roosevelt's view on Korea: it could not govern itself in the years following Japan's defeat; a Great Power administration would thus be necessary, with multilateral means preferable, unless American control was in jeopardy; trusteeship was the preferred means of multilateral administration, but full or partial military occupation of Korea might be necessary to ensure American influence.

A State Department territorial subcommittee paper done in No-

vember 1943 noted that "the security of the North Pacific will be of concern to the U.S."; Korea was of concern since "Korea's political development may affect this security." At about the same time, Benninghoff, Vincent, Borton, and Hiss (among others) prepared and reviewed a paper containing the following statement:

Korea may appear to offer a tempting opportunity to apply the Soviet conception of the proper treatment of colonial peoples, to strengthen enormously the economic resources of the Soviet Far East, to acquire ice-free ports, and to occupy a dominating strategic position in relation both to China and to Japan. . . . A Soviet occupation of Korea would create an entirely new strategic situation in the Far East, and its repercussions within China and Japan might be far reaching.<sup>12</sup>

There is no indication that Roosevelt knew about this and other planning, a matter that became immaterial when he died in April 1945. In the subsequent vacuum of foreign policy leadership an upward displacement of bureaucratic position occurred, such that relatively junior officers like Benninghoff came to play important parts in Korean policy, Benninghoff becoming a key political officer in the early days of the American occupation in Korea. Those who had looked after the parts, with little conception of the whole, rose. Thus at Potsdam the American delegation never discussed trusteeship planning for Korea, in spite of specific urgings by Stalin and Molotov that the matter was unprecedented and had to be discussed; in the middle of the conference the successful atomic test at Alamogordo convinced them that Soviet participation in the Pacific War was less important than they had thought. They delayed discussions of Korea policy, as Mark Paul's essay in this volume shows, and in the end there was no such discussion.

In the wake of the atomic attacks on Japan, several American officers attached to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), including Dean Rusk, found a line at the thirty-eighth parallel that could divide U.S. and Soviet occupation responsibilities in Korea. This occurred on the night of August 10-11, 1945. Stalin's response was to say nothing—the first of several anomalies in Soviet policy toward Korea, leading up to the fall of 1950. Why anomalous? Because the Soviets had entered Korea on August 8 and could have enveloped the peninsula long before the Americans could arrive.

SWNCC planners were desirous of stopping the southward flow of Soviet power in Korea; thus they wanted a line as far north as practicable, one that included the capital at Seoul. (Given American capabilities, no line was practicable if the Soviets resisted.) Thus the decision was political. The U.S. military was more reluctant, noting that no

11. This section is drawn from my *Origins of the Cold War*, vol. 1, chap. 4.

12. U.S. Department of State, Record Group (hereafter cited as RG) 59, Notter File, "Japan: Korea; Problems of International Trusteeship," Nov. 30, 1943.



forces for occupation were anywhere near Korea. Although the decision came in hurried times, it was a logical follow-on to planning that had linked the control of Korea to Pacific security as early as November 1943.

The reluctance of the American military to occupy Korea presaged another consistent pattern: the State Department wished to define Korea as important to U.S. security, but military planners sensed the limits of American military power and wondered if this peninsula were all that important in the context of global U.S. security concerns. Such worries came up again in 1947 and 1950, as we will see. Later in August 1945 yet a third pattern in American policy toward Korea was etched in: with the actual occupation, policy would increasingly be subject to decisions made on the scene rather than in Washington. State Department planners were too far off and too preoccupied with other matters to grab the reins of policy. Those on the scene quickly came to think that they knew better, and so sought to exclude the State Department. Thus "high policy," to speak in such terms, dallied behind Korean realities—usually by at least six months—and all too often the tail wagged the dog.

A month after the Korean problem was disregarded at Potsdam, the United States had sponsored a rush into Korea and had acquired, so it seemed, some sort of commitment to defend at least a part of Korea against Soviet encroachments or a Soviet-sponsored regime. This scramble into Korea, and this seeming commitment, had the support of virtually all government agencies concerned with the matter, from the president on down. Gen. John R. Hodge, occupation commander, not only understood this mandate but learned, also in late August, that his problems would include not simply the Soviets, but Korean revolutionaries released by the thousands from Japanese prisons after August 15. Such political prisoners joined others in setting up labor unions, political parties, "people's committees," and a host of peace-keeping forces that nearly supplanted the Japanese by the time the Americans arrived. Hodge knew this because of "a flood" of messages exchanged with Japanese commanders in Seoul who spoke darkly of Communists running rampant and desired an early American entry to prevent "the transfer of authority from the Japanese hand."<sup>13</sup>

Hodge thus, from the day he arrived, set about eliminating this domestic, indigenous revolutionary force, something that so greatly disordered the U.S. occupation, that the indigenous Left and its fortunes became the touchstone against which virtually all occupation policy was judged from 1945 to 1949 (the occupation did not actually

13. Cumings, *Origins*, 1:126-28.

terminate until June 1949, almost a year after the Republic of Korea was proclaimed). This meant that the cold war arrived in Korea in September 1945, with a de facto containment policy toward the Soviets in the north and a counterinsurgent policy in the south. Within the first three months of the occupation such policies led to, among other things, the surreptitious return of Syngman Rhee to Seoul (through an end run around State Department opposition), the revival of the very substantial Korean element of the Japanese national police, the utilization of Korean colonial bureaucrats in all departments, the extraordinary and insubordinate act of establishing National Defense Forces for the south alone (in October 1945), and finally moves toward the creation of a separate southern administration that would merge selected exile nationalists (Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku, mainly) with the colonial bureaucracy. Hodge was a premature cold warrior; like premature anti-Fascists he suffered opprobrium for his prescience. The State Department, at least in the Far Eastern office, was astonished by such policies. At the same time, however, Hodge's policies received the blessings of no less than John J. McCloy (November 1945), George Kennan (January 1946), and Averell Harriman (February 1946).<sup>14</sup> The problem was that his de facto efforts at containment not only ran counter to any possibility of cooperating with the Soviets in Korea, but also ran counter to the established high policy of trusteeship.

Although by early 1946 Hodge backed off from formally creating a separate southern regime, in effect a separate southern entity existed from December 1945 on; by August 1946 its Korean leaders were already questioning American "interference" in their activities. This same entity became the political basis for the ROK regime in 1948; very little changed during 1946 and 1947. What were the consequences of this early, precipitate action?

First, the southern regime was almost entirely an American creation, much more so than with the Nationalists in China or the successive regimes in South Vietnam. Second, the occupation intervened time and again in the countryside, either with U.S. tactical troops or with American directed Korean police, to suppress the opponents of this regime. Thousands died as a result of such actions, and indeed in the autumn of 1946 four of the eight southern provinces erupted in bloody conflict. How could all this be justified if the United States later washed its hands of the American supported conservatives? Third, the bolstering of this regime as a bulwark against communism in the north created a containment policy that, the more it held on, the more

14. *Ibid.*, p. 230.



changes on a world-wide scale would force Washington to see its virtues. In the dialectic of Soviet-American local interaction, with most of the early initiatives coming in the south, the thirty-eighth parallel became a line drawn in the dirt behind which were constructed dikes and edifices in the form of military, police, and civil bureaucracies, all with the main goal of stopping the southward flow of revolution, or the northward flow of counterrevolution. So what seemed wrong and insubordinate in 1945 came to seem early and prescient by 1947.

The difference between policy and implementation, or the high policy of Washington and the "low policy" of the occupation, may be likened to the philosophical distinction between theory and practice. Washington's theory was one thing, Seoul's practice was quite another. But it is much easier to modify or destroy high policy that remains in the realm of theory, than it is to modify (let alone destroy) a de facto practice that, in the doing, brings with it actual commitments. Thus it was that the years 1946 and 1947 saw Washington modify and eventually destroy its ostensible Korea policy, as hopes at home caught up with reality abroad.

#### FROM DE FACTO CONTAINMENT TO A CONTAINMENT POLICY?

From Washington's standpoint, the main problem with occupation policy was that it contradicted American policy toward Korea—not a minor matter. After Potsdam the Korean question was not again broached with the Soviets or the other Allies until December 1945, when the foreign ministers met in Moscow. The Korea portion of the agreed accords called for joint Soviet-American discussions leading toward the establishment of a unitary Korean provisional government, to be followed by a four-power trusteeship of up to five years. It was Washington that had again pushed the trusteeship issue, and indeed its draft paper at Moscow had suggested only a trusteeship, with nothing about a provisional government. The latter was a Soviet suggestion, as was the sequencing of the various steps. The United States accepted the Soviet proposals, in a mutual compromise that seemed to herald a reestablishment of Allied unity.

Washington's trusteeship policy had been publicly announced on October 20, 1945, by John Vincent, and it had set off a storm in Korea. All shades of political opinion opposed this seeming neocolonial device. Hodge and his advisers were forced, by this sentiment and by the effects of their implemented policies, to support the opposition to trusteeship. This they did; within days of the announcement of the Moscow accords Koreans in the south were saying the Soviets had pushed through trusteeship over the objections of Americans seeking Korean independence. Without going into more detail, this

grotesque distortion of what happened at Moscow became gospel truth for conservative Koreans, deeply confused the mass of Koreans, and led to the virtual scuttling of the Moscow agreements. In late January 1946, in the wake of this fiasco, Hodge submitted his resignation. It was not accepted, however, in part because Harriman had made a hurried trip to Korea and had decided that Hodge was doing a good job, which by implication meant that the State Department was not and therefore the ostensible American policy for Korea was wrong. These events severely biased the subsequent U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission meetings in the spring of 1946 toward failure, which indeed occurred in early May. Yet throughout 1946 the State Department maintained its commitment to a trusteeship for Korea, and did not relinquish this internationalist device until it found another: turning the Korean problem over to the fledgling United Nations. So, one had trusteeship in form (or theory) and containment in substance (or practice). Furthermore one had the slow welling up and congealing of a containment policy in Washington as well, as 1946 and 1947 proceeded.

The little-known scuttling of the Moscow accords in Korea was contemporaneous with the better-known reorientation of American policy in early 1946, the bench marks being Kennan's famous "long telegram," and the turn away from compromise with the Soviets (Truman had not liked the Moscow agreements, and decided to "get tough" with the Russians).<sup>15</sup> Thus major watersheds in the course of events within Korea came to move in tandem with major watersheds in the development of the cold war. Although Washington's policy remained trusteeship, and commitment to the Moscow plan, an unnamed State Department official attached to the U.S. delegation to the joint commission put U.S. policy rather differently in March 1946, and in so doing marked the degree to which the occupation's de facto policy was becoming more acceptable. The goal of U.S. policy should be "to bring about an independent, democratic, stable Korean Government capable of resisting Russian domination over a protracted period of time. In the American view, freedom from Russian domination is more important than complete independence. . . . Unless coerced by force, it is believed that Korea will, if left to itself, orient itself toward the United States rather than toward the Russians for the foreseeable future."

The memorandum described the American "primary objective"

15. Ibid., pp. 225-27; see also John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 282-315.



as preventing Russian domination, the "secondary objective" as Korean independence, and then went on to say:

Since Korean independence is a secondary objective, it is not believed to be in the U.S. interest to form a Korean Government which could be granted complete independence within the next few years. *Unless and until the U.N.O. can give reasonable proof of its ability to prevent aggression*, the United States, together with Russia, if necessary, must extend some form of territorial guarantee to Korea and exercise certain prerogatives in Korea's international relations. . . . Any method of forming a provisional government of Korea must, therefore, be based on the condition that some form of disguised control shall continue to be exercised by the United States for some years to come.<sup>16</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Here, clearly, was strong support for the occupation's policies, and the germ of a policy that would reconcile substantive containment with ostensible internationalism, that is, taking America's Korea problem to the United Nations.

By September 1946, Korea had become rather important, at least in the mind of one of Truman's high advisers. Clark Clifford's important, top secret report of that month<sup>17</sup> argued that "the U.S. should support and assist all democratic countries which are in any way menaced or endangered by the U.S.S.R."; in discussing certain "trouble spots" he turned first to East Asia: "This country should continue to strive for a unified and economically stable China, a reconstructed and democratic Japan, and a unified and independent Korea." Such countries "will require diligent and considered effort on the part of the U.S. if Soviet penetration and eventual domination is to be prevented." The paper also argued for global policies, not ones linked only to the preservation of a non-Communist Western Europe.

Such thinking led directly to the Truman Doctrine in early 1947, marking among other things a formal commitment to containment in Europe, and in Greece and Turkey. For a time it appeared that it would also be extended to Korea. On March 5, 1947, Secretary of War Robert Patterson addressed a letter to the Secretary of State, saying that Greece and Turkey were "only part of a much larger problem"; he thought it "important and urgent" to survey situations elsewhere in the world "which may require analogous financial, technical, and military aid on our part." This prompted a study of Korea, then getting

16. "U.S. Document no. 3, Joint Commission Files," quoted in "History of the U.S. Armed Forces in Korea," unpub. ms. (Seoul, Tokyo; 1947, 1948), 2, chap. 4:154-55.

17. "American Relations with the Soviet Union: A Report to the President by the Special Counsel to the President," Sept. 24, 1946, in *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1946-1950*, ed. Thomas Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 64-71.

about \$100 million per annum in all expenses connected with the occupation. An interdepartmental committee came up with a report, submitted to the secretaries of state and war,<sup>18</sup> which argued that containment should be extended to Korea and that the large sum (for that time) of \$600 million be appropriated for "a positive political, cultural, and economic program." The committee had interviewed Hodge, Gen. Archibald V. Arnold (military governor in Korea), Hariman, and others, all of whom apparently supported such a program. Although arguing that in the event of general war, troops and bases in Korea would be a liability, still "control of all of Korea by Soviet or Soviet-dominated forces, while not immediately serious, would constitute a strategic threat to U.S. interests in the Far East." Japan, in particular, would suffer "an extremely serious political and military threat." Korea needed a "positive program" in addition because it was "the only place in the world where the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. stand face to face alone." The report continued: "It is important that there be no gaps or weakening in our policy of firmness in *containing* the U.S.S.R. because weakness in one area is invariably interpreted by the Soviets as indicative of an overall softening. A backing down or running away from the U.S.S.R. in Korea could very easily result in a stiffening of the Soviet attitude on Germany or some other area of much greater intrinsic importance to us" (emphasis added).

A few weeks later the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued that

In the Pacific area of United States defense commitments, from the standpoint of urgent want, Korea, China, and Japan deserve consideration for current United States assistance. From the security viewpoint the primary reason for current assistance to Korea would be that . . . this is the one country within which *we alone have for almost two years carried out ideological warfare* in direct contact with our opponents, so that *to lose this battle* would be gravely detrimental to U.S. *prestige*, and therefore *security*, throughout the world. To abandon this struggle would tend to confirm the suspicion that the U.S. is not really determined to accept the responsibilities and obligations of world leadership.<sup>19</sup> [Emphasis added.]

The JCS went on to rank East Asian countries hierarchically according to their "importance to our national security": (13) Japan, (14) China, (15) Korea, (16) the Philippines.

If one looks back on such judgments from, say, the standpoint of

18. U.S. Department of State, RG 353 (SWNCC-SANACC), box 86, "334 Committee, Interdepartmental, Korea."

19. Joint Chiefs of Staff, "U.S. Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security," Apr. 29, 1947, in *Containment*, ed. Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 71-83.



1953, ranking Korea fifteenth in the world is perhaps not surprising. Looking forward from 1940 it would have been inconceivable to a State Department official (let alone a Korean) to find U.S. policy so interested in this little peninsula. Clearly a major change had occurred. Although the JCS paper, like the interdepartmental committee report, raised the possibility of abandoning Korea in time of global war (a critically important caveat we will return to), such concern for Korea was unprecedented in traditional American policy. And note the reasoning of the JCS: the United States had been directly battling the Communists in Korea. This was of course accurate, as the JCS knew from Hodge's voluminous reports, and expresses the creeping commitment that came with the counterinsurgent policy of the occupation.

On April 4, Secretary Patterson responded to such thinking by dropping a bombshell: the United States should "get out of Korea at an early date"; all measures should have early withdrawal as their goal.<sup>20</sup> He noted that the occupation was a great drain on War Department funds, that Congress was not likely to provide \$600 million for Korea, and if it did this would be a drain on other needed funds. He suggested either that the United States set up and recognize a separate southern government, or take the problem to the United Nations, both as methods of getting out. An important consideration for Patterson, and others, was the likely call on U.S. resources in China. The possibility of aiding the Kuomintang was still high. Another consideration, entirely bureaucratic, was that the War Department was footing the bill for an occupation engaged in a highly political struggle within Korea, and was getting little but criticism for its efforts from the State Department—including, during the period, plans to replace Hodge with a State-directed civil commissioner.

With this argument Patterson set the terms of a debate that would last down to 1950, in which the State Department argued for what might be called the *political*-strategic interest of the United States in Korea, while military departments at times recognized the political value, but tended not to say much about it and instead to argue that the *military*-strategic value of Korea was nil: it would be bypassed in a general war, and so the troops should come out. The situation was one in which the State Department defined the political value of Korea as high, with the fairly unsubtle suggestion that the occupation was botching the political aspect by supporting the Korean right-wing; whereas the military, tired of paying for a thankless struggle, and

20. U.S. Department of War, RG 319, Plans and Operations Division, "Korea 1946-1950," box 87.

worried about world-wide limits to U.S. power, retreated to a narrow general-war-based definition of Korea's value to the United States. One suspects that as often as not military planners hoped to pass to the State Department the responsibility—and the costs—for deciding where to make a stand, and when.

Dean Acheson, by then an under secretary of state, had somewhat different ideas. He told a secret congressional hearing in 1947 that "we have drawn the line in Korea." His point was that containment should be applied where it could work, but not where it would simply drain American blood and treasure. In a cabinet meeting in March 1947, for example, when queried as to why, if containment were the policy, the United States would want to pull out of China, Acheson responded, "Fundamentals of problems the same [in China]. The incidences are different."<sup>21</sup> The "incidences" in Korea were such that containment might work; in any case, as we have seen, the occupation had been trying to make it work.

These disputes over whether containment should apply to Korea, or whether the United States ought to cut its losses, were put off with the acceptance of SWNCC 176/30, "United States Policy in Korea," implemented in mid-August 1947.<sup>22</sup> This document argued that "The U.S. cannot at this time withdraw from Korea under circumstances which would inevitably lead to Communist domination of the entire country. The resulting political repercussions would seriously damage U.S. prestige in the Far East and throughout the world. . . ." The suggested course of action was to take the Korean problem to the United Nations General Assembly in the fall of 1947, assuming (as virtually all Americans in Seoul and Washington had since early 1947) that the second round of U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission talks would fail. So, while continuing to pursue de facto containment within Korea, high policy again was defined by internationalists who hoped that the UN could somehow retrieve and sanctify the American effort, an effort that the internationalists continued to criticize in numerous memos. It is noteworthy, however, that such a course was first suggested in Seoul in March 1946, just as the first joint commission convened, by a person with intimate knowledge of the internal Korean situation (see the SWNCC document cited above).

21. The first quotation is from U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings: A Bill to Provide for Assistance to Greece and Turkey*, 80th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 22. The second is from Matthew J. Connelly's summaries of Truman cabinet meetings, Mar. 7, 1947, cabinet meeting, in Connelly Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo.

22. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter, *FRUS*), 1947 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972), 6:738-41.



The move to the UN was a grand success in lining up multilateral backing for American policy in Korea, although the Americans (in Washington and Seoul) had constantly to cajole and threaten the delegates on the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) to get them (1) to agree to serve, over Soviet objections; (2) to hold an election in the south only, when their mandate was to hold it throughout Korea; (3) to validate that the May 10, 1948, National Assembly elections were conducted in a "free and fair" atmosphere (given that all delegates knew the election would bring Syngman Rhee and the rightist Korean Democratic party to power); (4) finally to recognize the Republic of Korea as "the only such government" in Korea organized under UN sponsorship—something that the Rhee regime immediately used as tantamount to official UN recognition. But the policy was also a failure, in that it not only accomplished but gave blessing to the final division of Korea and the separate southern regime that had been created, in its essentials, in the fall of 1945. In other words, the UN sanctioned a division and a regime that internationalists (John Vincent being the best single example) had fought against since early 1945. The reasons this could happen are two, and simple: (1) the United States utterly dominated the UN during this period; (2) both containment thinkers and internationalists were united by an irreducible minimum goal: Korea or a part of it should be kept out of the Soviet orbit, for otherwise the security of the Pacific would be threatened. This was where core U.S. policy stood from 1943 on; the move to the UN also froze U.S. policy until 1949. For two years from the fall of 1947, the United States was concerned with riding herd on various UN decisions, and on UNTCOK; it scheduled the withdrawal of its troops, but continually put this off—from August 1948 to December 1948 to June 1949. During this period, also, the question of containing communism in Korea or getting out also remained unresolved, although as long as American troops remained on the ground there were secret plans to defend those troops *and South Korea* in the event of an attack;<sup>23</sup> and the de facto containment policy continued apace in the form of American-supported suppression of insurgents on Cheju Island (from April 1948 on) and in the Chōlla and Kyōngsang provinces (from October 1948 on).

The essential argument over Korea within American circles from 1947 to 1949 continued to revolve around the military consideration

23. General Hodge told Gen. Albert Wedemeyer in August 1947 that during the fall 1947 uprisings in South Korea he and MacArthur feared an invasion and "had a plan" to defend Korea if this should happen. See Memo of conversation, Hodge and Wedemeyer, Aug. 27, 1947, Twenty-fourth Corps Historical File.

that Korea was not a good place to fight in time of general war, versus the political consideration that the loss of Korea would threaten Pacific security and call into question American prestige and credibility. It is my tentative view that during this period the military argument never had the upper hand, with one exception: in the fall of 1947 certain internal discussions seemed to suggest a consensus that the United States should "cut bait," should sit out in Korea, regardless of the consequences. This was the only time in the postwar period when one could, on the basis of the available documentation, argue for a fundamental change either in established or de facto U.S. policy toward Korea. That change was not implemented, but the deliberations are instructive.

Bureaucratically, the reason for consensus was that George Kennan, by then head of the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), agreed with the military that Korea was not a good place to make a stand in the cold war—although for reasons very different from those of the military. In June 1947 Kennan had remarked in a top secret memo that PPS saw only two areas outside of Europe requiring "large-scale economic assistance of the sort envisioned here for Europe"; these were Japan and Korea. But by September Kennan found "a real likelihood that Korea will eventually become a Soviet satellite," and recommended putting it at "the bottom of the list," meaning after Japan and China.<sup>24</sup> Why?

First, Kennan thought the military's strategic judgment that Korea was the wrong place to fight in time of general war was important, and had to be taken seriously. Second, and more important, in September 1947 PPS laid out the basic policy for the reverse course in Japan; the highest call on American resources should now be a revived and politically friendly Japan. Once this was accomplished, and assuming interim aid to keep Korea out of Soviet hands, Kennan hoped that Japan would again serve as a balancer to the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia. This idea was based on his reading of the diplomatic history of the previous half-century in the region, and on the ideas of his elder cousin, also named George Kennan, whom he revered. The best statement of Kennan's view came in a paper in 1949: "The day will come, and possibly sooner than we think, when realism will call upon us not to oppose the re-entry of Japanese influence and activity into Korea and Manchuria. This is, in fact, the only realistic prospect for countering and moderating Soviet influence in that area. . . ."

24. Kennan memo to Lovett, June 30, 1947, RG 59, Policy Planning Staff (PPS) File, box 33. Also, draft paper, "U.S. Policy Toward a Peace Settlement with Japan," Sept. 22, 1947, box 32, top secret. See also *FRUS*, 1947, 6:784.



He then cited Theodore Roosevelt's views in 1905 (ones that later sanctioned Japan's annexation of Korea, and that were formed with the help of advice from the elder Kennan).<sup>25</sup> Kennan's remaining notion was that Americans were not very adept at propping up Asian regimes. Americans were as ill-equipped for this as Asians were for enlightened government. Kennan's judgment on Asia reversed the Sinocentric schema of high civilization radiating outward from the Middle Kingdom, getting ever weaker as it approached the barbarian periphery. For Kennan, Asia was the far periphery of an advanced civilization emanating from Western Europe; the eastward projection had a decidedly downhill trajectory: the first drop was in Eastern Europe, the second in Russia (most of whose vices were Oriental), and the third (and here one began to scrape bottom) was China and its little brother Korea. In the late 1940s the nationalist side in China and Korea was incontinent and how could one have containment with incontinence? Americans should not attempt to do for them what they could not do for themselves. Japan was the exception because it had an industrial base, one of only five in the world. We had four and they had one and things should be kept that way, was Kennan's parsimonious idea behind his containment doctrine. Kennan also had been in contact with the "Japan lobby" during this period; the lobby was made up of assorted diplomats, bankers, journalists, and military leaders, and urged an end to the purges and reforms of the early occupation. They wanted a reinvigorated Japan that would be integrated with an American-dominated world economy; some among them wanted a rearmed Japan that would, à la Kennan, balance Soviet power in Northeast Asia. Thus Kennan concluded that cutting bait in Korea was not a bad idea, but for reasons that had not occurred to the U.S. military. On September 24 he recommended that "our policy should be to cut our losses and get out of there as gracefully but promptly as possible."<sup>26</sup> A rare consensus between the State Department and the military seemed to have latched onto option A: the elegant retreat.

The great success in the United Nations in late 1947, however, tipped bureaucratic ballast back toward a comfortable option B (the status quo) on Korea, while this new charge for the fledgling UN and the deterioration of the cold war increasingly biased U.S. policy toward a formal decision for containment in Korea. Option B was enshrined in a National Security Council document (NSC 8), approved by Truman

25. Kennan memo to Rusk, Oct. 6, 1949, RG 59, PPS File, box 13, top secret.

26. *FRUS*, 1947, 6:814; see also Howard Schonberger, "The Japan Lobby in American Diplomacy, 1947-1952," *Pacific Historical Review* 46, no. 3 (August 1977): 327-59; also John G. Roberts, "The 'Japan Crowd' and the Zaibatsu Restoration," *Japan Interpreter* 12 (Summer 1979):384-415.

in April 1948, and which governed Korea policy through the entire year.<sup>27</sup> This was the year that saw the final, formal establishment of separate Koreas, a post facto rationalization of decisions taken two years earlier. As 1949 dawned, however, new problems arose with this divided Korea and its leaders.

#### THE BAITING GAME

With U.S. policy poised between withdrawal (option A) and the nonclad guarantee of commitment (option C), two obstreperous Asian dictators sought to bait a far-off and seemingly reluctant guarantor. Chiang K'ai-shek and Syngman Rhee urged full U.S. backing for the southern side in their respective civil wars. Chiang could not get American policy to bite, and he ended up on Taiwan (still dangling bait). Syngman Rhee dangled bait all during 1949. A third dictator, Kim Il-sung, also sought support for his side of the civil war, in a bargaining relationship with the Russians *and the Chinese*—a matter we will get to shortly.

1948 was a year that changed the East Asian context of American policy profoundly. Most important, the Nationalists lost the civil war in China. The victory of Mao's forces had a tremendous impact on all actors in the East Asian milieu. For Americans, including George Kennan, it suggested a stiffened policy in areas contiguous to China. For Syngman Rhee and his allies, it struck terror in their hearts. For Kim Il-sung and his allies, it was the headiest thing that had happened since the capitulation of the Japanese Empire. Next in importance, the reverse course for Japan set in, giving the United States a strong commitment there and raising fears among Japan's old enemies. The spring crises in Czechoslovakia and Berlin suggested to Americans a Soviet policy willing to probe with force at the periphery of its empire. Within South Korea the old battles between the State Department and the occupation also ended; General Hodge was replaced in late August 1948, and a new ambassador, John Muccio, became the head of the American mission in Seoul. Unlike Vincent or Borton, Muccio was a cold warrior who got along well with the military,<sup>28</sup> and rarely if ever questioned the harsh repression that was daily fare under the Rhee regime. All of these changed circumstances combined to suggest once again the virtues of containment in Korea.

On December 17, 1948, the chief of the Division of Northeast Asian Affairs in the State Department, Max Bishop, penned a top

27. *FRUS*, 1948, 6:1164-69.

28. Oral history interview, John Muccio, Truman Library. Muccio thought his proven capacity to get along with the military was an important reason for his selection.



secret memorandum that fit Korea into previous considerations.<sup>29</sup> He wanted a careful review of NSC 8 in view of the changed situation. On Japan, he remarked, "Should communist domination of the entire Korean peninsula become an accomplished fact, the islands of Japan would be surrounded on three sides by an unbroken arc of communist territories . . . we would be confronted with increasing difficulties in attempting to hold Japan within the United States sphere. . . ."

Should Korea be lost, the United States "would have lost its last friend on the continent" with China's fall; "failure to face up to these problems in Korea could eventually destroy U.S. security in the Pacific." Bishop suggested a "positive effort" aimed, in Truman Doctrine terms, "to develop in non-Soviet northeast Asia a group of independent people . . . who, on an economically viable basis, are capable of successfully resisting communist expansion." Bishop was close to the Japan lobby and this statement reflected its views on Korea. Like Kennan, Bishop also noted that there was in Northeast Asia "one of the four or five significant power centers in the world." Then he asked the containment question: "Whether communist expansion in northeast Asia had already reached the point at which the security interests of the U.S. require positive efforts to prevent further expansion." But he also introduced a new question: "Whether the communist power system, already brutally frank and outspoken in its hostility to the U.S., must be *caused to draw back* from its present extensive holdings" (my emphasis). Elsewhere, in the National Security Council (NSC), the Economic Cooperation Agency (ECA), and the CIA, Japan's economic revival raised a similar question: how Japan could be viable without its previous Asian territories, how it could function except as a drain on American resources without its old "natural" economy. Japan needed an economic hinterland, and from 1948 to 1950 American planners sought it in Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.<sup>30</sup> Such thinking also suggested the virtues of rollback, at least in some of these regions. Thus, a rollback option had been suggested, and now the choices were four: cut bait, containment, ironclad guarantee, and rollback.

Bishop had urged that the NSC convene and discuss a review of NSC 8. When Army replied that it still required "a firm troop withdrawal date" because Korea was still a place of "little strategic interest," the dispute was referred to the NSC.<sup>31</sup> At this point, however, an

29. *FRUS*, 1948, 6:1337-41.

30. This idea is developed, with supporting documentation, in Bruce Cumings, "The Origin and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy, 1900-1982," *International Organization*, forthcoming.

31. *FRUS*, 1948, 6:1342, 1343 n.

old problem arose in new and dangerous form. The firmest advocate of rollback was Syngman Rhee. As early as June 1946 he had publicly urged for a "northern expedition" to kick the "Communist bandits" out of the north; he used the same Chinese characters that Chiang did for the northern expedition in the 1920s (*pukböl* or *beifa*). At about the same time he found a small coterie of unofficial American backers to support his plans for a separate southern government and a march north.<sup>32</sup> Americans familiar with South Korea since 1945 knew that not only Rhee, but his nationalist rival Kim Ku, and such other right-wing Koreans with experience in the Chinese Nationalist military as Yi Pön-sök and Yi Ch'öng-ch'ön, had grandiose plans not only to attack north but to keep on going into Manchuria, to open a new front in alliance with Chiang in the Chinese civil war. Hodge's intelligence operation also developed information that Kim Il-sung and *his* Koreans with Chinese experience on the Communist side, meaning mainly Mu Ch'öng and Ch'oe Yöng-gön, also had plans to attack south, using experienced Koreans (by the tens of thousands), doing or having done battle in Manchuria (assuming Mao would release them to Korea).<sup>33</sup>

32. Cumings, *Origins*, pp. 249, 532.

33. On September 18, 1947, Yi Ch'öng-ch'ön urged upon Hodge, in a top secret memorandum, the following course:

A Far East military alliance, under American leadership, should be concluded. In case of emergency the [South] Korean army will take the lead in standing at the front, and do their best, in combination with the Chinese [Nationalist] Army, to destroy the army of a communist country.

If America should allow the Japanese to be armed again and let them take part in the joint campaign, the Japanese army shall take charge of the operation in the localities of Maritime Provinces and Liaotung Peninsula, while the Korean army will take on the operations against the enemy front of Yalu River and Tumunchiang River. . . . If circumstances require, the force shall be advanced ahead. . . . According to the command of the Highest Commander of the American Army we will defeat, in close cooperation with the Far East allied armies [Nationalist China and Japan] the enemy in front of the Tumunchiang River and the Yalu River . . . and continue marching northward. . . .

Short of an all-out war in the Far East, Yi thought that within Korea, "before the [North Korean] communist army makes a raid over the [38th parallel] line, the [South] Korean Army will advance north of the 38th parallel, and march toward the Korea-Manchuria border defeating the communist armies every-  
where."

This memo is one of several similar ones that might be quoted; it demonstrates what the occupation had on its hands in South Korea. See RG 332, Twenty-fourth Corps Historical File, G-2 Weekly Summary no. 105, Sept. 7-14, 1947, enclosing the above memo. Yi Ch'öng-ch'ön was the leader of the powerful, paramilitary *Jaedong* Youth Corps.

As for the North Koreans, a trusted informant who claimed to have been at



Rhee muted his public threats in the summer and fall of 1948, since he and the ROK needed UN backing. But after the December 12, 1948, resolution giving de facto UN recognition to the ROK, Rhee's threats became palpable and dangerous. On February 8, 1949 Rhee met with Muccio and Army Secretary Royall, and according to the top secret memorandum of conversation, "[Rhee] said he would like to increase the Army, provide equipment and arms for it, and then in a short time move north into North Korea. He said that United Nations recognition of South Korea made it legal to cover all Korea and that he saw nothing could be gained by waiting."<sup>34</sup> Muccio responded by saying that "No such action should be taken certainly until there was an opportunity to work matters out peacefully with North Korea," and Royall said "Of course, no invasion could in any event take place while the United States had combat troops in Korea, and that his [Rhee's] suggestion was tantamount to a request that we should have all American combat troops removed." These were, it might be said, rather tepid handslaps to a call in a private, secret meeting by an American client for embarking on aggressive war. In the aftermath, however, Muccio and Royall drew opposite conclusions. Muccio wanted the troops to stay so that the ROK military could be controlled, while Royall and the military wished to withdraw so that they might choose whether or not to involve American troops in a Korean war, and the terms of such a war. Rhee continued such provocative rhetoric, publicly and privately, and thus one of the prime rationales for the final withdrawal of American troops in summer 1949 was to distance American power from this volatile charge, to give the Americans a choice in any possible hostilities.<sup>35</sup> As things stood

a meeting between Mu Chōng and Ch'oe Yōng-gōn in Manchuria, May 10, 1947, told U.S. intelligence that Ch'oe said the following: "Korea will soon be ours. At present there is not a single unit in the United Democratic Forces now driving the Kuomintang from Manchuria that does not have my troops in it. At the end of the Manchurian campaign these troops will be seasoned, trained veterans. When the Americans and the Russians withdraw, we will be able to liberate Korea immediately," See RG 332, "Intelligence Summary—North Korea," no. 38, June 15, 1947.

34. *FRUS*, 1948, 6:957.

35. This was a common view among Americans in South Korea. The ECA director, Arthur Bunce, made the point in early 1950 when he remarked, "President Rhee might be more compliant with our wishes if he were made to feel a little more uncertain about continuing U.S. support." *FRUS*, 1950, 7:31. George Kennan remarked during the Princeton seminars in 1953 that the question that troubled American planners before June 1950 was not so much a North Korean attack, but "whether we could restrain Rhee and the South Koreans from taking

in early 1949, the United States or at least its operative military commander in the region, MacArthur *did* have a mission "to repel attack by external hostile forces" as long as troops were on the ground.<sup>36</sup> This was, as we have seen, MacArthur's plan since at least late 1946.

Under urgent demands to resolve these problems, the NSC met and decided upon NSC 8/2,<sup>37</sup> basically an amendment to NSC 8 that did not change options A, B, and C, did not add the fourth option of rollback, and scheduled the final withdrawal for June 30, 1949. Bishop's emphases on the threat to Japan and the severe blows to U.S. and UN security were Korea to fall, however, were included. Also, more emphasis was placed on the impossibility (given Rhee's threats) of going the option C route: the ironclad guarantee. Troop withdrawal and the apparent indeterminacy of the American commitment to defend the ROK, would provide useful levers in bringing Rhee and his allies to heel. As the troop withdrawal beckoned, Rhee verged on panic and encouraged his military into aggressive actions that he hoped would force the United States to commit to his regime.<sup>38</sup> In the engagements that followed his forces were badly mauled by the North Koreans, however, and many Americans became more determined to place distance between the United States and the ROK. The last contingents of U.S. troops left by early July, the occupation (and U.S. operational control of the ROK military) ended, and Rhee seemed to have lost his baiting game.

#### CONTAINMENT WINS SANCTION IN A ROLLBACK PACKAGE

American policy, clearly, would not commit to Rhee's provocative rollback strategy. But during this same period—summer 1949—U.S. policy began to congeal around containing an overt North Korean

after North Korea." Dean Acheson Papers, Princeton Seminars, July 9, 1953 transcript, box 81, Truman Library. Acheson also said that if the United States had given an ironclad guarantee to South Korea, "you would in effect have given South Korea such an underwriting that their whole conduct would have been quite different and it would have been quite provocative and very belligerent" (*ibid.*, Oct. 10-11, 1953 transcript, box 84).

36. Cable, Department of War to MacArthur, Dec. 21, 1948, RG 218, JCS, 83.21 Korea (Mar. 19, 1945), box 25, formerly top secret.

37. *FRUS*, 1949, 7, pt. 2:969-78.

38. The KMAC Commander, Gen. W. L. Roberts, said that the South Koreans started the first major 38th parallel battle, at Kaesōng on May 5, 1949. He also thought that the South started the greater part of the fighting in the summer of 1949. See *FRUS*, 1949, 7, pt. 2:1009; also Roberts letter to Maj. Gen. Charles Bolte, Sept. 13, 1949, in RG 319, P & O Files, box 548.



attack, and by December 1949 this policy had arrived with new options, one of which was rollback. This assertion directly reverses the conventional historiography, but new documentation requires such a reversal, in my view. On June 27, 1949, the Department of the Army drew up a top secret schedule of options in the event of "a possible full scale invasion from North Korea subsequent to withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea."<sup>39</sup> The possible courses of action included (a) emergency evacuation of American nationals in Korea; (b) presentation of the problem to the United Nations Security Council for emergency consideration; and (c) "to initiate *police action* with U.N. sanction by the introduction of a military task force into Korea composed of U.S. units and units of other member nations of the U.N. with the objective of restoring law and order and restoration of the 38th parallel boundary inviolability" (emphasis added). The paper recommended adopting options (a) and (b) as policy, but option (c) was deemed "unsound militarily" and should be considered only if "all other methods have failed." The JCS subsequently stated its agreement with these judgments. Thus the military stuck to its long-standing judgment that Korea was the wrong place to make a stand—but now with the single caveat, unless all else fails.

The reference to "police action" is very important. The military's thinking about Korea had assumed conditions of general war to this point, but here the idea of limited war intrudes. At about the same time, George Kennan at PPS was thinking along similar lines. After PPS seemed to have washed its hands of Korea policy, with little mention in its voluminous papers from late 1947 to 1949, Korea reappeared in a memo of March 28, 1949, referred to in the same breath with Greece and Turkey in a discussion of military assistance programs. In July, Kennan offered his "personal view" on Formosa (Taiwan) and U.S. Asian policy.<sup>40</sup> He argued that *if* the military continued to think that global U.S. requirements forbid a major attempt to defend Formosa, then the United States should reconcile itself to its ultimate takeover. He went on to say, however, that in the wake of the Chinese Communist victory on the mainland, "Our situation in the Far East will not permit further inaction in areas where our military and economic capabilities would be adequate to meet the possible commitments flowing from intervention." If "others" (meaning for the most part the military) agreed with him, "then my

39. *FRUS*, 1949, 7, pt. 2:1046-57.

40. RG 59, PPS Papers, box 33, Mar. 28, 1949, paper on military assistance; also, box 2, July 6, 1949.

personal view is that we should take the plunge" and intervene to protect Formosa. The logic would seem to fit South Korea as well.

As part of a PPS project to take stock of the American position in the wake of the Maoist victory, on August 24 John Davies, Jr. wrote to Kennan that "Finally, the question must arise someplace in our relations with the U.S.S.R.—and it will probably be in Asia—whether we can afford to follow indefinitely a policy of avoiding risks of conflict with them at whatever cost to us."<sup>41</sup> He added the interesting observation that "It would appear that we could not embark on such a course [intervention], even on a limited scale, *until the Communists have so acted as to justify our retribution* along the lines of this paper" (emphasis added). In meeting 148 of the PPS, Oct. 11, 1949, Kennan remarked that the JCS were always making maximum estimates of enemy capabilities and basing policy on them, when in fact "limited rather than total warfare should be our objective."<sup>42</sup>

The above papers were not immediately framed in policy statements, but just as with the coincidence of views between the military and PPS in the fall of 1947, two years later both the JCS and the PPS were considering a limited or police action in Asia to stop what they all took to be Soviet expansion. From within South Korea came similar urgings. Muccio was a constant advocate of ever greater military aid to the ROK, and on October 19 remarked that "American interest, strategic and otherwise, in Korea is large and increasing daily." A month later, as part of a top secret request for more material, Muccio stated that a "serious emergency" might "arise at any time."<sup>43</sup> A month after that Acheson wired Muccio that the State Department wanted to encourage the ROK "to appeal to the [U.N.] General Assembly . . . if there should be a major military attack across the thirty-eighth parallel."<sup>44</sup> All this went on contemporaneously with Muccio's considerable worries about Rhee's blustery threats and the distinct likelihood that the ROK Army might seek to march north; the CIA was predicting a North Korean attack in the wake of U.S. troop withdrawal.<sup>45</sup>

11. *Ibid.*, box 13.

12. *Ibid.*, box 32.

13. See memos in *FRUS*, 1949, 7, pt. 2:1088, 1100, 1108.

14. Nov. 1, 1949, RG 59, decimal file 895.00.

15. See U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Consequences of US Troop Withdrawal From Korea in Spring, 1949," Feb. 28, 1949, ORE 3-49, top secret, p. 5: the CIA deemed it "highly probable" that an invasion would follow the withdrawal. Harry S. Truman/President's Secretary's Files (HST/PSF), box 256, Truman Library.



From the fall of 1949 to the spring of 1950 was, as Acheson aptly put it, "the NSC 68 period." It was, in other words, the time when the State Department and NSC pursued a major—perhaps the major—reorientation of postwar global policy, resulting in the famous NSC 68 document. Simultaneously the same agencies developed NSC 48, "The Position of the U.S. with Respect to Asia," approved by Truman in its second revised form as 1949 drew to a close.<sup>46</sup> This document was, in effect, an NSC 68 for Asia policy. Although this documentation has been available since the mid-1970s, most analysts have missed the interesting dialectic between containment and rollback policies that runs through both documents.

In its final form NSC 48/2 included for the first time an expressed commitment to extend containment to Asia: "For the foreseeable future . . . our policy must be to contain . . . the power and influence of the USSR in Asia." But there was another phrase as well, in the second ellipsis: "to contain and *where feasible to reduce* the power and influence of the USSR in Asia" (emphasis mine). Although Korea was not mentioned in this context, the logic of the new policy meant that the policy of containment pursued in Korea since August 1945 had won final sanction. But what about the suggestion of *reducing* Soviet power and influence? Was this an insignificant addendum? The deliberations leading up to the adoption of NSC 48/2 show that it was not. In conjuring the realm of the feasible, policy makers had rollback in their minds.

First let us look at the application of containment. In the summer of 1949 PPS was not alone in its desire to resist further Soviet (i.e., Communist) expansion in Asia. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson stimulated the NSC 48 deliberations by recommending on June 10, 1949, that the American objective should be "to contain communism" in Asia.<sup>47</sup> Earlier on, in a paper included in Truman's own NSC file, the CIA had argued that smaller Pacific Rim countries like Formosa, Korea, and Indonesia were "becoming critical" as a result of the Chinese Communist victory; in this region, "the available opportunities as well as the pressing necessity for stabilizing US influence are being concentrated."<sup>48</sup> Attention focused on Formosa during the NSC 68 period, down to the outbreak of the Korean War, with various agencies

recommending that it should or should not be defended; it is critical to understand that for high policy makers like Acheson the Taiwan and Korea questions were (1) part of the same problem of resisting further Communist encroachment, but (2) two different problems because Taiwan was interconnected with the American desire to split China off from the USSR, whereas North Korea was seen as a complete Soviet satellite. Thus, the containment logic that emerged in 1949 fit Korea much better than it did Taiwan. In one of Acheson's few references to Korea in these months, he remarked that "the all-or-nothing boys refuse to do what is possible in Korea, because we will not attempt what is impossible in China."<sup>49</sup> Here he referred to his efforts to get economic and military aid bills for the ROK through Congress, but the separation of the Korean and Chinese problems in regard to the limits on American power was clear.

In a very important early draft of NSC 48, a "sanitized" copy of which was declassified in 1981,<sup>50</sup> the sense of pressure coming all along the Soviet-influenced perimeter runs through the document; the United States "must be able to apply pressure on any front at a time of its own choosing if it is not to lose the advantages of the initiative." Containment logic was thus applied world wide; the Soviet mechanical car would be stopped by judicious application of pressure along a global perimeter in which the earlier perceived differences between Europe and Asia had disappeared. The commitment to containment in the revised version (NSC 48/1) grew out of this world-ranging logic of perimeter defense. Far more striking, however, is that containment had become an "option B," sandwiched between option C, which was the status quo to 1949 in Asia, and a new option A: rollback. The first draft of NSC 48 was not about containment, it was about rollback.

To begin with, the phrase in the final NSC 48 document, "contain and where feasible reduce" Soviet power, was rendered as follows in the first draft: "Our immediate objective must be to reduce the power and influence of the USSR in Asia." In responding to Communist activity the United States, as mentioned earlier, would apply pressure along the Communist periphery "on any front at a time of its own choosing if it is not to lose the advantages of the initiative." (In all the rollback talk of the early 1950s, there was constant reference to seizing the initiative through an active policy—Dulles's "positive action"—in contrast to the alleged passivity of containment.) The draft

46. Included in *Containment*, ed. Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 252-76. NSC 48/1 was the approved document, NSC 48/2 the approved and slightly modified conclusions to the document.

47. *FRUS*, 1949, 7, pt. 2:1108.

48. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 12-48, "Review of the World Situation," Dec. 16, 1948, in HST/PSF, National Security Council Meetings, box 205, Truman Library.

49. Acheson to David Bruce, July 26, 1949, in Acheson Papers, memoranda of conversation, box 64, Truman Library.

50. Memo to Rusk, Burns, Fahey, Oct. 26, 1949, sanitized copy declassified Feb. 13, 1981, in HST/PSF, National Security Council Meetings, box 207.



referred as follows to the possibility of getting Asians to fight Asians in the interests of seizing the initiative: "Asia contains indigenous forces which if effectively developed in aggressive pursuit of the cold war should be able by means short of war to *commence the roll-back* [sic] of Soviet control and influence in the area, without constituting a serious drain on United States economy."

In the final draft, however, this paragraph was amended to say "to the degree that Asian indigenous forces develop opposition to the expansion of USSR influence, they would assist the U. S. in *containing* Soviet control and influence in the area. . . ." (my emphasis). Thus in both this instance and the key phrase about containing and reducing Soviet power, containment *had to be added* to a first draft thinking only of rollback.

Furthermore, in discussing the containment defense perimeter in Asia, the first draft stated that control of perimeter defense "may be adequately established by the United States only if the area of communist control is reduced," a thought that was dropped in the final draft. Another dropped phrase asserted that "Before its defeat, Japan was a strong anti-communist force in Asia," which has interesting, but unexplored, implications. All in all, the authors wanted a "dynamic program" in American Asian policy, allowing it to act "in a positive manner"; the new, dynamic policy would be "a springboard for positive action in Asia." These rollback phrases were left out of the final draft.

The conclusions to the first draft recommended that the United States reconsider its entire Asian policy, and make "certain fundamental decisions respecting future policy." They recommended the annexation of Taiwan ("the United States should obtain title to Formosa") and its use "in the event of war"; Japan should also be available to the United States should war occur. Chinese Communist expansion should be blocked through "every practicable measure" including overt and covert action, short of "the commitment of US military forces." A "high-ranking individual," either military or civilian, should be appointed "to direct all United States efforts against communism in the vicinity of China." Two other concluding recommendations have deletions in this "sanitized" draft, making it impossible to know to what they refer, although they may refer to CIA and military G-2 covert forays into China and North Korea, of which there were many in this period. A peace settlement with Japan was recommended: "brief, non-punitive, and confined to general principles." With Japan, the United States should promote "a strong trading area among the non-communist countries of Asia." And finally, "The United States should mobilize all instrumentalities of the government which may be effectively utilized . . . in order that a coordinated political, eco-

nomie and psychological offensive [here follows a 23-space deletion] may be brought to bear against the communist conspiracy in Asia." Here indeed was Asia's NSC 68, a strategy for creating an Asian "grand area" for free trade and anticommunism.

NSC 68, adopted in effect if not formally in April 1950,<sup>51</sup> contained similar references both to containment all along a global communist periphery, and to rollback. Soviet mischief might mean global war, or it might mean "limited objectives"; in any case the United States must "apply force" to counteract such activity. But containment was not conceived passively: "As for the policy of 'containment,' it is one which seeks by all means short of war to (1) *block* further expansion of Soviet power, (2) expose the falsities of Soviet pretensions, (3) *induce a retraction* of the Kremlin's control and influence and (4) in general, so foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system that the Kremlin is brought at least to the point of modifying its behavior. . . ." (emphasis added). Later on the document referred to "the checking and rolling back" of the Kremlin's drive, "to check and to roll back" its attempt at world domination, the taking of "dynamic steps to reduce the power and influence of the Kremlin," and so on.<sup>52</sup> In short, the dialectic between containment (passive bulwarks) and rollback (dynamic action) was nearly identical to that in NSC 48. For the drafters of NSC 48 in the fall of 1949 the changed Asian context included not just the Maoist victory, but also the reverse course in Japan. Communism in China meant a need for new bulwarks (the containment metaphor): thus, in the NSC 48 draft, "we must decide whether to acquire Formosa" or not; "we must decide whether to attempt to make India the bulwark against the extension of communist control" in South Asia; in Southeast Asia, the United States should find a resolution to "the colonial-nationalist conflict," in ways that "satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist movements, lay the basis for political stability and resistance to communism, and avoid weakening the colonial powers who are our Western allies." (Thus the final draft recommended aid to the French in Indochina.) A new mechanical car had emerged, directed by Moscow through Peking, necessitating bulwarks all along the China perimeter. But what did the reverse course for Japan suggest?

Put simply, the drafters thought the revived Japanese economy would require an Asian hinterland in order to function. This was an idea that ran like a thread through much of the reverse course planning.

51. NSC 68 was declassified by Henry Kissinger in 1975. It is included in *Containment*, ed. Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 383-442.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 393, 401, 429, 434-35.



We have already seen that Kennan immediately grasped the *strategic* logic of reviving Japan: it should be reintroduced in Northeast Asia as a counter to the Soviet Union in classic balance-of-power fashion. But the NSC 48 drafters, and other agencies such as the ECA and the CIA,<sup>53</sup> saw an *economic* logic as well. In this they were joined by elements of the private sector in the Japan lobby, representing banking and high-technology industries that did not fear Japanese competition. Their basic conception was to fit the Japanese economy into a hierarchical model of transnational capitalism, based on the economic reasoning of comparative advantage and the product cycle, in which Japan would be a distinctly second-rank economy in relation to the United States (and kept on an oil, food, and defense dependency to give the United States leverage), but would be the leading Asian economy, drawing raw materials and finding markets in an Asian hinterland. As I have argued elsewhere, this conception bears close comparison to Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system model, founded on multiple tripartite hierarchies of core, semiperiphery, and periphery.<sup>54</sup> The results of the war had put Japan distinctly back in the semiperiphery vis-à-vis the United States, but it had also deprived Japan of its colonial periphery in Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, and North China. Most American planners thought in 1949 that the Japanese economy would be unviable without a hinterland. Given the splitting of Korea, the Communist victory in China, and the likelihood that Taiwan would fall, they naturally looked to Southeast Asia as a likely periphery.

Thus NSC 48/1 argued that Japan can be self-supporting only if "it is able to secure a greater proportion of its needed food and raw material (principally cotton) imports from the Asiatic area, in which its natural markets lie." The first draft, in a statement left out of NSC 48/1, said "certain advantages in production costs of various commodities in the United States, Japan and Southeast Asia suggest the mutually beneficial character of trade of a triangular character between these three areas." The countries of Southeast Asia had "a marked comparative advantage in the economies of production" of "strategic materials . . . such as tin, rubber, and hard fibers." This thinking was retained in the final draft, although references to a triangle involving Japan were dropped because they smacked too much of the prewar situation. But trade with China was not foreclosed for Japan

53. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, ORE 43-48, May 24, 1948, in HST/PSF, memoranda 45-49, box 255, Truman Library; Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), unsigned memo of Nov. 3, 1948, Acheson Papers, box 27, Truman Library.

54. See Cumings, "The Origin and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy."

because this, too, was thought to be good for Japan's economy, and what was good for Japan's economy was also good for the United States, if not for our European allies who resisted Japanese re-entry into Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia was the main candidate for Japan's hinterland in the period from 1948 to 1950, but there were some suggestions that the old hinterland might be more appropriate, if Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan could be kept out of or wrested back from Communist hands. Thus an ECA memorandum in Acheson's papers, dated November 3, 1948, argued that "North China and Manchuria constitute the one area of vital importance to the U.S." in Asia; "the Japanese proved it to be the key to control of China," and without the resources of the area, "there would literally be no hope of achieving a viable economy in Japan." The author noted "the strategic and economic relationship of North China and Manchuria with Korea and Japan." Thus, "our first concern must be the liberation of Manchuria and North Korea from communist domination." A covering letter said that this memo "has met with such approbation in a number of quarters that [Acheson] might be interested in reading it."<sup>55</sup> There is no record of Acheson's reaction.

Stretching from the Pacific ports of North Korea through Manchuria into North China was the only well-developed industrial structure in Asia outside of Japan, with heavy industries such as steel, iron, petrochemicals, automobiles, and hydroelectric generation, newly installed by Japan in the 1930s and early 1940s. The parsimonious industrial-structure logic of Kennan's containment policy (we had four, they had one) would seem to make this Northeast Asian complex more important for Japan than Southeast Asia: here was Japan's true "natural" economy, the result of its imperial policies over four decades. I have found only scattered evidence that the "liberation" of this region had anything to do with NSC 48, or with the march north after the Korean War began. The most one can say is that the rollback logic mingled security and economic considerations inextricably, and that both the security and the economic advantages of rollback were more obvious in Northeast than in Southeast Asia.

The more important points about rollback in 1949 are two: first, such contingency planning cleared the way for the adoption of containment in Asia, by making containment seem to be a compromise rather than a wholly new policy. Rollback ran interference for containment, turning it into a comfortable option B. Rollback phraseology then provided a rationale for marching into North Korea, as we will see.

55. ECA, unsigned memo; see n. 53.



Second, this was liberal rollback. That is, a handful of high policy makers, all from the moderate Democratic and Republican "middle," penned the rollback logic. This had nothing to do with the rollback sketch at the beginning of this paper, at least in regard to the social constituency for such policies. Japan-firsters, not China-firsters, developed the rollback planning; they were the people who had argued *against* containing communism in incontinent China. The Japan-firsters, moreover, were Europe-firsters as well, having an integrated understanding of Japan's place in the world economy and the virtues for American interests of a revived Japan that would simultaneously weaken the British in Southeast Asia and continue England's American-cushioned fall from empire. The policy would enhance American hegemony in Asia and Europe simultaneously.

Rollback talk also had great value in domestic politics. It would steal an issue from the Republican Right, while bringing Republican moderates such as Dulles into a much more stable coalition behind American cold war policy. Indeed, it was during the "NSC 68" period that Dulles joined the Truman administration, and it is then—not in 1953—that he began talking about "positive action," the rollback metaphor.

#### SOME WAITING GAMES

Had Stalin or Kim Il-sung read NSC 48/1, either would have predicted the entry of American forces into a Korean war under conditions of direct, unprovoked, conventional invasion. With the subsequent development of NSC 68 in early 1950, the likely effect of an attack in Korea on world-wide security would have been just as obvious. Presumably neither Stalin nor Kim read these top secret documents.<sup>56</sup> But Acheson, Muccio, and other officials had read them. Having read them myself, I can only say at this point (especially in the absence of State Department files after December 1949, still unreleased to the National Archives), that much remains to be explained about the behavior of those responsible for Korean and Asian policy in the months leading up to June 25, 1950. In particular, why was there not a public or diplomatic initiative to make American policy clear, and to head off the impending conflict?

56. William Manchester claims that Kim Philby and Guy Burgess, as first and second secretaries at the British Embassy in Washington in 1950, sat on the top secret Inter-Allied Board; Philby is said to have acted as liaison officer between the CIA and UK Secret Intelligence Service. Manchester thinks that they passed American battle plans in Korea to the Russians in the fall of 1950. Presumably the Russians could also have viewed top secret planning prior to the Korean War, a point that Manchester does not mention. See *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), pp. 596-98.

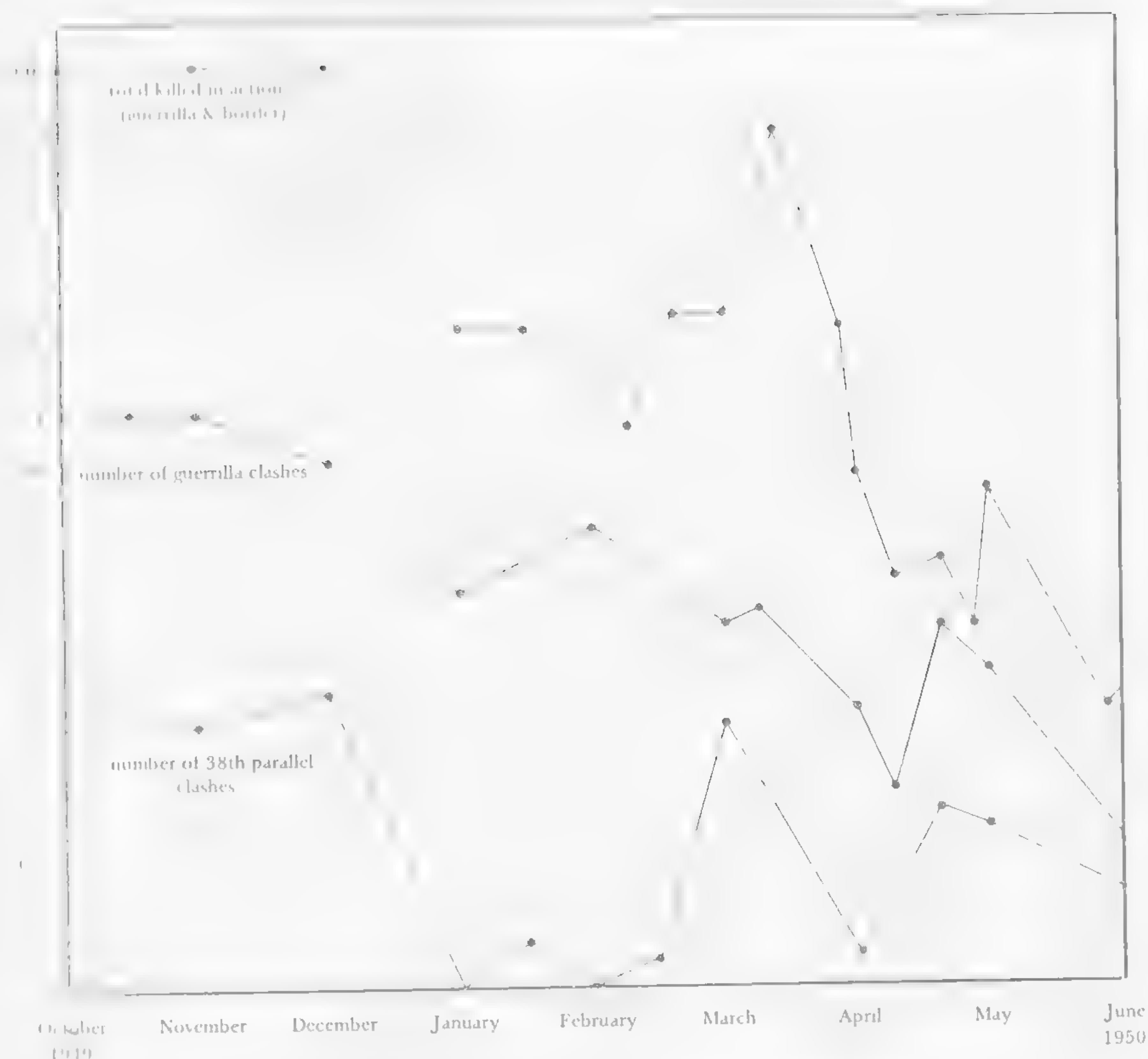


Fig. 1. Guerrilla and thirty-eighth parallel fighting, October 1949-June 1950

SOURCE: KMAG G-2 (Intelligence) Weekly and Periodic Reports

Three more facts need to be established. First, as mentioned earlier, throughout most of 1948 and 1949 a guerrilla struggle existed in the south, and after May 1949 it was punctuated by numerous engagements along the thirty-eighth parallel. By April 1950, however, as figure 1 demonstrates, this guerrilla effort was virtually extinguished and border incidents also tailed off to nothing after March 1950. Second, major transfers to North Korea of Korean soldiers who had been fighting in the Manchurian campaigns with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) occurred in 1949 and early 1950; Kim Il-sung seems, in other words, to have won *his* baiting game with Mao. A minimum of thirty-thousand soldiers were involved in these transfers, and the troops became the main shock forces in the early stages of the Korean War. According to U.S. military intelligence, Korean units made up perhaps 20 percent of PLA forces in Manchuria, and within the North Korean military Korean officers who had been at Yen'an or had served in the Chinese civil war made up fully 80 percent of all officers. The Chinese were happy to



utilize Korean soldiers, but they disliked "the rigidly nationalist views" of the Koreans. One of the top northern leaders, Mu Chǒng, a Korean who had made the Long March and was said to be close to Chu Teh, reportedly demanded that the Chinese Communists should reward North Korea with the Chinese province of Chientao in recognition of Korean sacrifices in the civil war.<sup>57</sup> Within North Korea the regime recruited soldiers using entirely nationalist appeals, with no reference to China or the Soviet Union, and not much to socialism.<sup>58</sup>

Although the origin of the Korean People's Army cannot be discussed further here for reasons of space, the point to remember is that battle-hardened Koreans directed this army, using highly nationalistic appeals; Chinese influence was greater than Soviet influence from 1946 on (the year the army began forming), and yet this was a Korean rather than a puppet army. In 1950 the Soviets shipped tanks and other materiel to North Korea, *primarily to compete with the Chinese for influence*, just as they do today. The DPRK gets its high-technology military items from the USSR, the depth of its experience is with China, but its heart is thoroughly Korean. I believe, although I cannot at this point prove, that the conventional battles of the Korean War began because the North wished to unify the peninsula and provide thereby the basis for an authentically revolutionary-nationalist regime that could resist domination by outside forces, including the Soviets and the Chinese.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore it is my view that the ostensible

57. RG 332, Intelligence Summary—North Korea, no. 36, May 18, 1947; also no. 37, May 31, 1947.

58. Some recruit interviews in 1948 give the flavor of the appeals:

Q.: Why did you volunteer for the People's Army?"

A.: I want to participate in the struggle.

Q.: What is the struggle?

A.: The struggle against the traitors and pro-Japanese.

Q.: Don't you like working in the fields?

A.: Since I am young I would rather fight than work in the fields.

Q.: Since all the people like the People's Republic [*inmin konghwaguk*, not *minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk*, interestingly], why do Syngman Rhee and Kim Koo oppose it?

A.: Because they want to fill up their dirty stomachs.

Q.: Who must build the People's Republic?

A.: We must build it with our own hands."

Another recruit was asked, "Who is the greatest patriot?" and answered, "General Kim Il-sung"; "Who are our enemies?" "Landlords, capitalists, pro-Japanese and reactionary elements"; "What if the American bastards shoot you?" "I will suffer anything, even death, to defeat them."

See numerous recruit interviews in the original Korean, SA 2005, Item 5/44, in RG 242, "Captured Enemy Documents," National Records Center, Suitland, Md.

59. I think the evidence is overwhelming that the North Koreans launched

sible "Korean War" subsequent to June 25 was in fact a denouement, not a beginning; it was a civil and revolutionary struggle fought over issues that were joined immediately after liberation in 1945, moving through a political phase in 1945-46 in which revolutionaries sought to establish people's committees in North and South, into a phase of mass rebellion in the fall of 1946, then into a period of unconventional warfare from early 1948 to the beginning of 1950, and finally to a phase of conventional warfare that began in the summer of 1949 on a small scale, then moved into a quiet period of waiting as both North and South sought backing from their guarantors for a conventional assault, and then into hot war as the People's Army, in MacArthur's phrase, "struck like a cobra" and nearly enveloped the peninsula within weeks. I also think that this last phase was initiated by Kim Il-sung and his allies over *at best* Stalin's acquiescence and *at worst* over his objections. Subsequent Soviet behavior in the fall of 1950 supports such an interpretation, as we will see. Had the United States not become involved, the June war would have been a denouement to the previous period. All of this, of course, is subject enough for another article. The question here is why, in the face of numerous reports about a coming invasion, little was done to stop it.

American intelligence—that is, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAC) G-2 and the separate G-2 operation that Colonel Willoughby ran for MacArthur (the general excluded the CIA from Korea)<sup>60</sup>—monitored the movement of Korean troops from China to North Korea, and the steady southward displacement of troops, tanks, and materiel within North Korea; as the southward movement continued, warnings of imminent attack became standard fare for intelligence officers.<sup>61</sup> The U.S. military was much more cognizant of North Korea's China connection than was the State Department—it tended to discount G-2 reports of Chinese involvement. More important, the military saw a monolithic communism in Asia, whereas the State Department made distinctions between China and the USSR and

the major fighting on June 25, perhaps utilizing a minor provocation by the South. RG 242 contains one piece of evidence supporting this that historians might not ordinarily find: in several notebooks compiled by mechanics and technicians as they serviced North Korean airplanes in the Third Squadron in the period from April to June 1950, we find that entries for April show various inspections and servicing, whereas those of June 19, 20, and 22 show the exclusive entry, "airplane preparation" (*pihaenge chunbui*). See SA 2005, Item 4/75, in *ibid*.

60. I confirmed this in a discussion with Gen. Joseph Stilwell, who was CIA Attaché in June 1950 (March 1978, Seattle, Washington).

61. RG 319, no. 873, Intelligence Library "P" File, 1946-51, KMAC G-2 Weekly Summaries and Periodic Reports, 1948-50.



sought to split one from the other in 1949-50. The State Department—and especially Acheson—saw the Formosa and Korea questions differently: Formosa should not be defended because to do so would alienate Mao and Chou En-lai; North Korea was a Soviet satellite and an attack from that corner was a different matter.

The CIA, or its operatives, at times claimed to have predicted the invasion, but its general estimate of the situation, issued a week before the war, predicted more of the same: more guerrilla war and political struggle designed to unseat Syngman Rhee and cause the collapse of his regime.<sup>62</sup> KMAC intelligence officers collected the empirical evidence which, in hindsight, pointed to an invasion. But people on the scene had lived with invasion scares ever since April 1946, when Hodge predicted an invasion timed to coincide with Soviet activities in northern Iran. By 1950 there had been thousands of such warnings. The full run of KMAC G-2 reports in 1949 and 1950 show the facts of southward deployment, but no evidence of “intelligence” derived from these facts sufficient to predict an invasion. MacArthur’s own weekly G-2 reports sent up through regular channels in the weeks before June 25 also contain evidence pointing toward an invasion, but none of the characteristic red pencil marks that usually indicated the drawing in of commander’s attentions.

On May 10, the ROK defense minister publicly called the attention of foreign correspondents to the “arrival of two divisions of Chinese [sic] Communist troops in Northern Korea,” and two days later Rhee commented at a press conference on the defense minister’s statements:

I have heard North Korean troops [are] concentrating near the 38th parallel. . . . We can do nothing. We will solve this matter through the UN and the United States. . . . North Korea is concentrating near the thirty-eighth parallel. I do not think these North Korean troops are concentrating near the thirty-eighth parallel to invade Japan or China. . . . In South Korea the U.S. has one foot in South Korea and one foot outside so that in case of an unfavorable situation it could pull out of our country. . . . General Roberts and Ambassador Muccio have worked to obtain more arms for Korea, but people in the United States are dreaming.<sup>63</sup>

For six weeks after mid-May the ROK government was silent on the North Korean build-up. The KMAC G-2 reports from the period are very poor and sketchy. A full understanding of this strange period—the only one since August 1948 not marked either by southern threats to march north, or alarms about “bandit” aggression—must await more documentation. There seems to be little question that by June

62. *FRUS*, 1950, 7:109-21.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.

1950 Rhee had been convinced by his American advisers—official ones like Muccio and unofficial ones like Robert Oliver<sup>64</sup>—that no help would come from the United States if he initiated a war, or if he clearly provoked an attack. In June 1950 silence for this inveterate gambler may have been his last refuge.

In any event, the first Korean War was, as Muccio later put it, “fortunately clearcut.”<sup>65</sup> Clear-cut, that is, to everyone except a small handful with close knowledge of the Korean scene since 1945. A psychological, but critical, distance intruded between the likely war of summer 1949 and the actual war of June 1950. It came like a thunderclap, and thus historians have been concerned with “who started the Korean War.” It is a question no one has thought to ask about the Vietnam War.

When war came in the form of frontal invasion, with only the barest attempts to claim provocation, American involvement was a foregone conclusion. All high officials at Blair House were unanimous for intervention, minus a few military demurrals about committing ground troops. A formerly top secret JCS study of the decision to intervene put the argument simply, and correctly:<sup>66</sup> the rapidity of the decision is itself evidence that the Truman administration was “already pledged” to defend South Korea. State Department intelligence officials also got together in record time (mid-afternoon, June 25 Washington time) in a thorough discussion of the situation that was heavily loaded toward intervention.<sup>67</sup>

The NSC 48 decision, and the June 25 decision, were decisions for containment. Containment was a classic option B between those who favored rolling back communism and those who favored the internationalist measures we have discussed; containment was a convenient fall back point that did not necessarily compromise the ultimate goals of rollback or internationalist accommodation. For all practical purposes, this compromise was forced in Korea in 1945. By late 1949, Washington’s policy makers gave final approval, in effect, to the actions Hodge and others had taken since 1945 to forge an anti-Communist bulwark in the South. Strangely, however, the containment compromise did not last long. North Korea’s lunge forward opened up the realm of the feasible: the first postwar opportunity to reduce Communist-held territory. But before getting to that story, there remains a

64. See Robert Oliver, *Syngman Rhee and American Involvement in Korea* ( Seoul: Panmun Books, 1978), chap. 11.

65. Oral history interview, John Muccio, Truman Library.

66. Joint Chiefs of Staff, “The Korean Conflict,” sec. 6, vol. 4, chap. 5, p. 3, in Modern Military Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

67. *FRUS*, 1950, 7:148-55.



certain lacuna that will have occurred to the reader by now. What about Acheson's press club speech?

#### DEAN ACHESON AND THE KOREAN WAR: A HYPOTHESIS

On January 12, 1950, Acheson spoke on Asian policy at the Press Club in Washington, D.C. Although few at the time commented on it, after June 25 observers noted that he had seemingly excluded South Korea from the American defense perimeter in Asia. His Republican opponents, and many historians since, argue that he "gave the green light" to the Communists to attack. In his memoirs Acheson says surprisingly little about this controversy, except to dismiss his critics and to remark on the "stupidity" of the Russians in sponsoring the Korean attack.<sup>68</sup> In the Princeton seminars, a retrospective set of discussions on Truman policies, Acheson said "in those days I was fresh and eager and inexperienced," one should have known that in speaking off the cuff from notes, and in not consulting others, "you've left yourself open to a very serious misunderstanding."<sup>69</sup>

When a researcher reads through the private papers of a prominent individual, sitting astride the daily stream of policy papers, memos, notes, letters, and diaries, he forms judgments. Some people he likes more, others less; some he respects more, others less; eventually he arrives at certain conclusions about the person. Acheson's papers bring forth the unshakeable judgment that this was not a naïve nor an inexperienced person. Indeed, few American secretaries of state have ever matched Acheson's grasp of world affairs, his vision, his ability to articulate policy, his capacity to think questions through and to discern logic in the flow of events. For Acheson the world in 1950 was like a set of city blocks, here was Europe, there was Asia; the Asian block had Japan next to Korea, China next to Indochina, and Acheson had shrewdly conceived policies for each. Only people who have never sought intellectually to order global events (and therefore think it impossible), or specialists who plumb the parts at the expense of the whole, could fail in Acheson's papers to find a man who was the antithesis of the naïve groper. In some circles of foreign policy analysis it has become de rigueur to deny that policy makers have any plans at all, or to see in the imputation of a plan some sort of conspiracy theory. "Acheson never thought about Korea, he had no time to do so," said one commentator on an earlier version of this article. This is fallacious. Acheson thought about the global city

68. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Signet Books, 1970), pp. 465-67, 970-71.

69. Princeton Seminars, Feb. 13, 1951, box 81, Truman Library.

and each block in it on a daily basis; furthermore he had plans, visions, and he kept secrets.<sup>70</sup> All hegemonic statesmen do; for that matter, someone so lowly as an academic department chairman does as well, if on a decidedly lesser scale.

So, in what follows I make the hypothesis that Acheson knew what he was doing in his press club speech, that he fit Korea into the logic of over-all Asian policy, and that therefore the speech and its aftermath demand extensive probing and thought. To do otherwise would be to deny the man's character, to ignore his acumen, and indeed to make of history a nihilistic endeavor in which we all flounder about aimlessly. But, given the lack of documentation from January 1950 on, this can be no more than an interpretation, a set of hypotheses that seeks to render intelligible what has long been unintelligible.

When the Korean War broke out, Acheson dominated American policy on the question. The declassified Blair House meeting minutes make this palpable; furthermore it was Acheson who made the decision to take the Korean question to the UN Security Council on the evening of June 24 (Washington time), *before* he had notified Truman of the fighting; it was Acheson who told Truman there was no need to have him back in Washington until twenty-four hours later; it was Acheson who labored alone on the afternoon of June 26 with fundamental decisions committing American power to the Korean War, approved that evening at Blair House.<sup>71</sup> Acheson later remarked that in regard to NSC decisions in general, the JCS and other military agencies would make their case (always a bad one, he thought), "then a discussion, and then—in my experience, always—the President deciding in favor of what I thought was the sound view, which was the one I presented to him." Kennan stated that the Korea decisions were "not something pressed upon [Acheson] by the military leaders, but rather something arrived at by himself, in solitary deliberation."<sup>72</sup> The decision to intervene was, therefore, Acheson's decision, supported by the president and other civilian leaders.

Acheson's press club speech was also something arrived at "in solitary deliberation." This was to be a public, and therefore sanitized or understated, explanation of the new policy for Asia (NSC 48/1).

70. For instance, Acheson's secretary, Lucius Battle, asked if Acheson's telephone call with Secretary Pace of July 13, 1950, should be recorded via dictation; Acheson responded, "We have agreed to make no record of it. Repeat nothing."

71. Acheson's appointment book, entry for July 14, 1950, in Acheson Papers, box 46, Truman Library.

72. Princeton Seminars, Oct. 10-11, 1953 sessions, boxes 83 and 84, Truman Library.

73. *Ibid.*



Acheson received from the State Department several drafts of the speech, but rejected them all—including one from George Kennan that asserted his ideas about reinvolving Japan in the Korean and Northeast Asian situation.<sup>73</sup> Instead Acheson labored alone on the speech for several days, spoke from notes, and then did not keep the notes. The speech was taken down verbatim and distributed by the State Department.

Acheson spent more hours on this speech than he did on the decision to intervene in Korea. His appointment book<sup>74</sup> shows that he had a meeting about the speech on January 5, worked all day alone on it January 8, met again about it on January 9 in the morning, worked on it again on the afternoons and evenings of the tenth and eleventh, and then on the twelfth, "all morning at home working on the speech." He did not discuss the defense perimeter concept with anyone until using it in the speech. His fundamental point, which he later thought the speech made "quite clear," was that nations within the perimeter would automatically be defended (e.g., Japan): "this is the line which we can hold and will hold." For certain nations outside the perimeter (e.g., South Korea) the initial reliance in case of attack would be on the people attacked to defend themselves, while invoking UN collective security sanctions.<sup>75</sup>

This was a wholly acceptable rendering of Acheson's own position. He had to look after the whole, and knew that American power was stretched around the globe and could not plug holes and fissures in the containment periphery everywhere. The UN and allied support would be necessary, which he had earlier recommended for *both* Formosa and South Korea in the event of an attack.<sup>76</sup> Also, both Formosa and South Korea had recalcitrant and obstreperous leaders whose favored policy was rollback, and therefore an ironclad commitment to defend them would lead to uncontrollable behavior, perhaps provocation. As early as February 1949 Acheson had spelled out this logic with perfect clarity in regard to Formosa and the same logic fit Korea. The United States, he said, should not encourage the irredentist issues that animated Chiang K'ai-shek, "just at the time we shall be seeking to exploit [re: China] the genuinely anti-Soviet irredentist issue in Manchuria and Sinkiang"; furthermore, "It is a cardinal point in our thinking that if our present policy is to have any hope of success in Formosa, we must carefully conceal our wish to separate

73. See the draft, dated Jan. 9, 1950, in George F. Kennan Papers, box 24, Princeton University Library.

74. Acheson Papers, box 45, Truman Library.

75. Princeton Seminars, July 23, 1953 session, box 81, Truman Library.

76. *FRUS 1949*, 7, pt. 2:1088.

the island from mainland control." And then, "If we are to intervene militarily on the island, we shall, in all probability, do so in concert with like-minded powers, preferably using UN mechanisms and with the proclaimed intention of satisfying the legitimate demands of the indigenous Formosans for self-determination either under a UN trusteeship or through independence."<sup>77</sup> The speech therefore was an acceptable public rendering of Acheson's carefully constructed position on Asia, but it had a realm of ambiguity necessary to conceal Acheson's desire to keep both Formosa and the China mainland, and North and South Korea, divided. Secrecy was necessary to prevent outcries from military and congressional leaders who would say the defense budget could not sustain commitments to such places, and to maintain the ambiguity to discipline China and Rhee.

Acheson was not, on the available record, an advocate of "positive action," at least in regard to Korea and Taiwan. This would tie American policy to petty dictators for whom Acheson had contempt, and to likely provocations that would reinvolve the United States in two Asian civil wars. It is likely that *he* made the revisions in NSC 48/1 that introduced containment rather than rollback as the main point. Acheson's entire emphasis, during the NSC 68 period and in his speech, was on constructing a *defense*, not an offense, and this is why he introduced the notion of a defense perimeter in Asia and why he envisioned different defenses for Formosa and South Korea. The one remaining point here, referred to earlier, is that the intention to defend South Korea had to be stronger in his mind than the intention to defend Formosa, because North Korea was assumed to be purely a Soviet proxy whereas China might be split off from Moscow.

In constructing his own defense against critics after June 25, Acheson chose a football analogy to explain himself. It may be material that the American global war plan at the time was titled "Offtackle." In any case, in some handwritten notes in his papers is the following: "What we have had to do is to construct a defense with inadequate means, trying to guess where each play would come through the line. The charge regarding Korea is that we should have known that the attack was coming; that we should have announced that we would meet it and that we should have armed ourselves and the Koreans to meet it. As to the first, the task of an opposition is to oppose and perhaps it is doing its best with a *situation which it itself created* (emphasis added)."<sup>78</sup> Acheson is the linebacker and he knows they

77. NSC 37/5 memoranda, Mar. 3, 1949, in HST/PST, National Security Council Meetings, box 205, Truman Library.

78. Acheson memo to "Jim" (probably James Webb), August 2, 1950, Acheson Papers, box 65, Truman Library.



may come around end or throw a pass or come off tackle. A properly constructed defense encourages the offense to choose one instead of another option. Acheson was, as he says, present at the creation; he saw himself as shaping a world from the standpoint of American hegemonic interests with limited resources. In Asia he wished to shape a defense, to create a situation, in which the offense would blunder. Perhaps this is why he refers in his memoirs to the "stupidity" of the Russian attack in Korea, when other characterizations might come to mind—perfidy, aggressiveness, probing a soft underbelly.

But what if the offense had its headquarters in P'yŏngyang and not Moscow? Stupid is not an adjective that I have ever considered applying to Joseph Stalin. Kim Il-sung was not stupid, either, but he and his allies were—and remain today—extraordinarily incapable of attributing subtlety to American policy; for them the United States was just another imperialist among the many that have bedeviled Korea. Furthermore Kim was and is fixated on Korea and the desire to reunify his divided country. If we make the assumption that Acheson was not simply constructing a defense, but a particular defense that would encourage action in one place and not another, Kim may have played into his hands. Stalin, on the other hand, gave apparent lukewarm support to the endeavor and then pulled back, both in June 1950, when he pulled advisers back, and in the subsequent course of the fighting, when according to Khrushchev he failed to provide North Korea with the wherewithal for victory.<sup>79</sup> Stalin had a policy similar to Acheson's in regard to Socialist allies along the containment periphery. Support them, if Russian interests are not hurt, abandon them (e.g., the Greek guerrillas) if they are, but in any case leave a realm of ambiguity that does not commit Soviet might. Above all, make a mess here, make a mess there (Korea, Indochina) in the hope that the Americans would be drained in a hemorrhage of blood and treasure.

The documentation does not permit any firm judgments on these matters. It does suggest an interpretation of Acheson's behavior, however, that refutes naïveté, indecision, or inexperience, and that sees him doing more than creating a passive and ill-considered defense in Asia. He seems to have wanted to proffer a menu of choices to the Communists, and to encourage a choice that would be preferable from the American standpoint. His idea was that the best offense against the Soviets was a well-constructed defense. This was shrewd contain-

79. See *Khrushchev Remembers*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 367-73; also John Merrill's discussion of this passage based on the original Russian transcript, in *Journal of Korean Studies* 3 (1981): 181-91.

ment, but it was still containment, resting on the idea that if positive action were the order of the day in 1950, it was better if the Communists acted first. During the Princeton seminars he and his colleagues agreed that "Korea came along and saved us" (another participant said "Thank God for Korea"),<sup>80</sup> a frank acknowledgment that the Korean crisis provided the rationale for NSC 68, and indeed for the fundamental reorientation of American global policy. But to put it more accurately, we might say Kim came along and saved them. Richard Nixon in a new book suggests not football but poker as the analogy for Acheson's Korea policy in early 1950: "The North Koreans thought our intentions were face up on the board. . . . It [June 25] was a miscalculation by them, based upon a misrepresentation by us."<sup>81</sup>

#### CONTAINMENT VS. ROLLBACK: WHAT DID THE SOVIETS KNOW?

Acheson's policy was containment, but in the NSC 68 period he made policy with some State and NSC officials who favored positive, not passive, defense. Their idea, countering Acheson, was that the best defense is a good offense. In the spring of 1950 John Foster Dulles joined the administration, speaking about "positive action," but was channeled by Acheson into the peace treaty negotiations with Japan. On June 19, 1950, Dulles materialized on the thirty-eighth parallel, eyeing Kim Il-sung through binoculars. In a speech to the National Assembly in Seoul, he promised "positive action" to the Koreans. From June 23 to June 25 (Tokyo time) he had extensive consultations with MacArthur.<sup>82</sup> The available record suggests that Dulles did not think much of MacArthur, indeed that he recommended his dismissal upon returning to Washington. There is no evidence that he and MacArthur had a meeting of minds about Korea, although Dulles was the first to recommend the use of American forces in the Korean fighting.<sup>83</sup>

But if we can imagine ourselves, knowing what we now know, but sitting in Moscow in June 1950, what would we have thought of Dulles's behavior? We have seen that a dialectic between containment and rollback ran through the deliberations on Asian policy in Washing-

80. An unidentified person said, according to the transcript, "Korea came along and (saved?) us do the job for us," whereupon Acheson says, "I think you can say that." Princeton Seminars, July 9, 1953 session, box 81, Truman Library.

81. Richard Nixon, *The Real War* (New York: Warner Books, 1980), p. 254.

82. Dulles had dinner with MacArthur on June 24 and 25, Tokyo time.

83. Acheson records that Dulles recommended using U.S. troops if necessary on the morning of June 25, Washington time. See his "Notes on meetings," Acheson Papers, box 81.



ton. The stunning depth and complexity of the Korean crisis is revealed, however, in suspicions that Stalin also knew about this policy dialectic. Kim Philby and Guy Burgess, Soviet spies in the British intelligence service, sat astride the flow of top secret documentation in Washington. Philby has admitted that he tipped Moscow to a joint effort by British and American intelligence to pursue rollback in Albania, that is, to topple the Communist regime there. American writers have now begun to suggest that Stalin may have read U.S. intelligence documents in the fall of 1950, something that MacArthur thought true at the time.<sup>84</sup>

Now imagine yourself responsible for the security of allies along the containment periphery, the problem that vexed U.S. policy throughout the period of 1948 to 1950. Only assume that these are Socialist allies and you are in Moscow. Would it not be your duty to inform your allies of the possibility that they might be subject to attack, in a situation where they were already subject to guerrilla forays by the opposition? Then add to this the lone, idiosyncratic, but extraordinarily influential figure of MacArthur, seeing himself as a man of destiny, presiding over the revival of Japan (an aggressor five years earlier), and speaking openly of saving all Asia from communism. What would be the best defense in this situation? It would be a good offense, that is, a pre-emptive attack such as that on the morning of June 25.

Here we do nothing more than conjure and play with the logic of the situation in June 1950. This is not history, it is pleasant speculation. These are questions that history cannot answer, at least not now and most likely, never. For those involved on all sides take secrets to the grave. In the Princeton seminars there was an interesting colloquy between Herbert Feis and Dean Acheson. Acheson remarked that "I can't recall why we sent [Dulles] over [to Korea and Japan]." Feis asked, "Are you sure his presence didn't provoke the attack, Dean? There has been comment about that—I don't think it did. You have no views on the subject?" Acheson: "No, I have no views on the subject." And then Kennan breaks in: "There is a comical aspect to this, because the visits of these people over there, and their peering over outposts with binoculars at the Soviet [sic] people, I think must have led the Soviets to think that we were on to their plan and caused them considerable perturbation." Acheson: "Yes—Foster up in a bunker with a Homburg on—it was a very amusing picture." Here the colloquy ended.<sup>85</sup>

84. Kim Philby, *My Secret War* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), pp. 194-98. See also Manchester, *American Caesar*, pp. 596-98.

85. Princeton Seminars, Feb. 13, 1954 session, boxes 81 and 84, Truman Library.

Yes, comical, amusing. But the best evidence on the North Korean attack is that it was organized in the week before the war by a few high officials, with even members of the cabinet remaining in the dark until June 25.<sup>86</sup> Foster in a bunker with a Homburg may not be immaterial to how "Korea came along and saved us."

#### KOREAN WAR II: ROLLBACK

The deliberations on containment and rollback in the NSC 68 period reflected new assumptions about the uses of American power, but they would be no more than abstract assumptions if no rollback had occurred. It did occur, and the march into North Korea was justified by reference to the previous phraseology and reasoning.

All this has been obscured by a historical verdict in which the debacle of the North Korean campaigns has been blamed on MacArthur; the desire to fault MacArthur is palpable throughout the Princeton seminars and indeed in most liberal histories of the war ever since. MacArthur did want rollback, it is true, but so did some of his liberal colleagues at the State Department and NSC. In fact the rollback policy drew together a far more broadly based coalition behind Korea policy than had ever existed before. It healed splits between internationalists, containment advocates, baitcutters, and rollbackers, leaving only some isolated internationalists in its wake. Had the successes of the march north not been so fleeting, the coalition would have included Japan- and Europe-firsters seeking an Asian hinterland with China- and Asia-firsters hoping to recapture China for Chiang; they were all in support of rollback after the September 15 Inch'ŏn landing. This rollback coalition would later have been strained over the question of whether to go beyond the Yalu, with the Asia-firsters in support and the Europe-firsters opposed, fearing that this would bring World War III. Or, a unified Korea under American auspices might have temporarily stabilized domestic conflict over foreign policy, until rollback met a failure elsewhere. With the Chinese intervention, however, the United States did not get a unified Korea but thought it was about to get World War III, judging from the panic and clamor in the Truman cabinet.<sup>87</sup> Eventually the fighting stabilized around the thirty-eighth parallel again, the crisis passed, and with it went rollback as a viable American policy. From that time until the 1960s and the Bay of Pigs, containment was the preferred policy

86. See Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972): 394.

87. See cabinet meeting minutes, Nov. 28 and Dec. 12, 1950, Connelly Papers, Truman Library. Those present spoke of the possibility of "total war," declaring national emergency and "total mobilization" in the United States.



of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, rollback nothing more than rhetoric.

Until the Inch'ŏn landing, there was no unanimity among high policy makers. John Foster Dulles was among the first to call for rollback, on July 14. The PPS argued a week later, however, that the Kremlin would intervene to protect North Korea, which in turn led to an "emphatic dissent" by John Allison, director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs. At the end of July, the Department of Defense submitted a paper arguing for rollback and showing a touching regard for Korean aspirations for unification—something rarely seen in American policy before or since, and explicable solely by the opportunities of the fighting in Korea. This paper, however, also argued that the fighting provided "the first opportunity to displace part of the Soviet orbit," and thus linked rollback thinking with the realm of feasibility pointed to in NSC 48/1. Then in Allison's top secret paper of August 12, the NSC 48/1 phraseology was patent: "Since a *basic policy* of the United States is to *check and reduce* the preponderant power of the USSR in Asia and elsewhere, then UN operations in Korea can set the stage for the non-communist penetration into an area under Soviet control" (emphasis added).<sup>88</sup> This phrase reappeared several more times in top secret planning prior to the move north. Still, however, there was no unanimity; Kennan and the CIA, among others, continued to oppose a march north. Up to the Inch'ŏn landing, U.S. policy had determined only to wait until the moment arrived, when the realm of the feasible might present itself, or might not; the decision would be taken accordingly.<sup>89</sup>

MacArthur's brilliant success carried everything before it in Korea, and everything behind it in Washington. It stimulated a consensus on rollback so broad that it stretched all the way from MacArthur to internationalist John Vincent, the main antagonist in the State Department of the Korean Policy of the occupation and the military. On October 7 Vincent weighed in from exile in Bern, saying "Personally, I believe we should cross the 38th parallel when set to do so irrespective of whether Chou En-lai is bluffing or not." Another archetypal liberal who suffered the wrath of the McCarthyites, O. Edmund Clubb, remarked that he hoped the Chinese would get a good bloodying if they dared to intervene.

88. See: (1) Dulles to Nitze, July 14, 1950, in *FRUS, 1950*, 7:386-87; (2) PPS draft memo, July 22, in *ibid.*, pp. 449-54; (3) Allison to Nitze, July 24, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 458-61; (4) Defense Department draft memo, July 31, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 502-10; and (5) Allison draft memo, Aug. 12, *ibid.*, pp. 567-73.

89. See NSC 81/1, and various papers leading up to that decision, in *ibid.*

90. Vincent to Secretary of State, Oct. 7, 1950, *ibid.*, p. 902; also Clubb to

American policy, so unanimously supported, met a debacle of gargantuan proportions with the commitment to rollback. The Chinese "taught a lesson" that has yet to be unlearned: option B, containment, was and is the preferred option. This is where U.S. policy toward Korea has remained to this day. There is no withdrawal, and there is no iron-clad guarantee, in spite of much pleading by successive Korean presidents. Mercifully, there is no rollback option.

Three remaining points should be made in conclusion.

The first observation has to do with General MacArthur. The range of his mind and his raw assertion of will in the weeks following the invasion strike me as breathtaking. He claims to have conceived the idea for an amphibious attack behind North Korean lines, and a rolling up the peninsula, in the smoke and ashes on the outskirts of Seoul on June 29.<sup>91</sup> In any case by July 17, three weeks after the war began, and while the People's Army was still rolling, he told Army Department representatives in Tokyo<sup>92</sup> that he planned an amphibious assault at Inch'ŏn, Haeju, or Ch'innamp'o (the last two are above the thirty-eighth parallel); his plan was "to destroy North Korea (and) to block off the hope of relief from Manchuria or China." If the Chinese came in, "I would cut them off in North Korea. . . . The only passages leading from Manchuria and Vladivostok have many tunnels and bridges. I see here a unique use for the atomic bomb—to strike a blocking blow. . . ." He also noted in passing that "the problem was to compose and unite Korea." Here was rollback with a vengeance, and a very early suggestion for the tactical use of nuclear weapons. During July and August, MacArthur pursued his plans with the fierce will and determination of a visionary, an onslaught before which other responsible Americans melted away, especially in light of the rollback talk in Washington.

As a second observation one might ask how rollback could be successful in Korea. Such invasions were part of U.S. contingency planning in Vietnam, but the plans were never implemented. One answer is that although Korea was also a civil and revolutionary war, the areas of revolutionary strength had an entirely different physiognomy than in Vietnam. The Left in the South was strong precisely in those provinces most distant from North Korea. The southernmost Kyōngsang and Chōlla provinces and Cheju Island were the repositories of the strongest people's committees in 1945 and 1946, the fiercest rebellions in late

Clark, Nov. 4, 1950, pp. 1038-41.

91. Manchester, *American Caesar*, p. 659.

92. Memo to General Bolté, July 17, 1950, top secret, declassified copy in Modern Military Branch, National Archives.



1946, and the guerrilla conflict of 1948-50.<sup>93</sup> Korea had a *political* geography that resembled Vietnam's actual geography: that is, communism in the North, a thin belt of strength running down the middle of the mountainous east coast, opening out to rooted strength in southwestern and southeastern provinces. In between was not a central highlands as in Vietnam, never integrated under the control of the central state. Instead there was Seoul, two or three conservative provinces, and a well-developed transportation and communications net that defined the core region of Korea. Off to the west was not a jungle with indeterminate national boundaries (Cambodia, Laos), but the Yellow Sea. These differences, it seems to me, help explain both the defeat of the southern insurgents and the failure of North Korea's conventional assault. The People's Army never reached inside the Pusan perimeter, to Taegu and Pusan, major leftist strongholds; they arrived late in the Chŏlla provinces and never on Cheju Island. Thus the North Korean calculus—a Bay of Pigs calculus—that their attack would touch off a popular explosion, proved false. Although their strategy was correct *if* the United States did not intervene, the application of American military force dashed their plans and, because of Korea's political physiognomy, opened the way to losing the North as well.

Third, what of the Soviets during this period? We have seen that Stalin originally acquiesced in the thirty-eighth-parallel decision in August 1945. A second seeming anomaly occurred in December 1948, when he withdrew Russian troops from the North, something quite contrary to Soviet satellite policy in these years, and therefore contrary to the usual assumption that North Korea was a docile Soviet tool. Third, Stalin watched as tens of thousands of Korean soldiers who fought with the Chinese Communists entered North Korea in 1949 and 1950. To a consummate realist who had once inquired how many divisions the Pope had, this would only indicate a likely skewing of North Korea toward China. Fourth—and still unexplained—was the Soviet absence from the UN Security Council in June and July 1950. Last, and most important, why did the Soviets apparently do little or nothing when MacArthur moved into North Korea? The various drafts of NSC 81 in September 1950<sup>94</sup> argued that the United States should not go north if the Soviets even *threatened* intervention, let alone if they actually intervened. NSC thinking was the mirror image of its assumption that Stalin had ordered the attack. During the fall of 1950,

93. Cumings, *Origins*, pp. 267-381.

94. *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, includes several drafts of NSC 81, along with the final document. The drafts explicitly referred to "a roll-back," if the realm of feasibility opened.

according to the available documentation, the Soviet Union was virtually mute (save some propaganda blasts that cost them nothing) while China and India made most of the representations to the Americans about the march north. Nor did the Soviets order the Chinese into Korea, according to the best scholarship and documentation on the subject. So what was the Soviet "commitment" to North Korea? One can hazard a guess that it was not comparable to the U.S. commitment to South Korea, and of a distinctly different order from Soviet commitments to key states on its East European periphery; also that Stalin was willing to allow an adventurous Kim Il-sung to stew in the juice of his own provocations; last, that Soviet behavior in the fall of 1950 must inevitably reflect back on its role in June 1950. Stalin did *not* order the only attempt since 1945 to pierce through by force of arms the containment periphery. Therefore one hazards a final guess: that Kim Il-sung and his Korean allies moved in June 1950 not at Stalin's order, but to unify their country, revolutionize the South, and thereby provide the basis for a self-contained national communism that could resist great power pressure from any source, including China and the Soviet Union. After the war this peculiar blend of Korean nationalism and Marxism-Leninism developed in the North alone, and therefore on a much slimmer base.

As for American policy, and the three sketches at the beginning of this article, we may note the following. First, the post-Inch'ŏn successes of the fighting in Korea healed splits among these three currents, making for a broad coalition behind rollback. Had it worked—had the Chinese not intervened—the coalition would have held until another rollback debacle occurred. Second, given that it did not work in Korea, a revisionist history had to emerge: MacArthur, the lone wolf, would be blamed for the failures, while Dulles would again merge comfortably with the broad middle, while using rollback rhetoric to sate the outraged appetites of the Republican right wing. But, third and most important, the failure of Korean rollback meant that decisive limits had been placed on "positive action" for at least a decade, making containment the vastly preferable policy for the liberal elites then in control of U.S. foreign policy. Containment in fact, albeit with rollback rhetoric, became the policy of the quiet years of the Eisenhower administration. Liberal rollback had failed, but it was blamed on Asia-first rollbackers like MacArthur. And so MacArthur slowly faded from the scene, but not without some uproarious pulling and hauling in domestic American politics, as the rollback constituency fought back against the reversal of verdicts on who was to blame for the debacle in the frigid North Korean hinterland.





## Commentary

LLOYD GARDNER

HISTORIANS HAVE TREATED THE KOREAN WAR AS A MISTAKE, EITHER BY THE United States or Russia—or both. Thus Akira Iriye in *The Cold War in Asia* suggests Korea was a blunder committed by the two superpowers “searching for a new equilibrium” following the Chinese Communist victory over the Kuomintang in 1949. Stephen Ambrose finds the United States was waiting for an incident, which, perhaps unwittingly, the North Koreans supplied, to launch a whole series of European and Asian initiatives aimed at reversing what was perceived as an unfavorable (to use the mildest term) trend in world affairs. George F. Kennan, in looking back after several years, concluded instead that the North Korean invasion may have been a response to initiatives already under way. The American decision to proceed with the conclusion of a Japanese peace treaty, involving, as it did, the indefinite retention of American military bases in the Japanese islands, probably had an important bearing, he wrote, on “the Soviet decision to unleash a civil war in Korea.”<sup>1</sup>

I think it quite remarkable that almost no one accepts the official explanation given by President Truman that the attack of June 25, 1950, revealed that the Russians were prepared to go beyond subversion and propaganda to further their aim of world domination, or, only a shade less dramatic, that Korea was a testing place, where the United States must put up or shut up. My own feeling is that we ought to go back to official explanations, and the discussions behind them, if we are to advance the discussion of the origins of the Korean War lest it become bogged down just at a crucial point or breakthrough.

Professor Cumings has broken down the prewar period into three periods: first, 1943 to 1947, when American policy centered on the hope of a big-power trusteeship for Korea. Second, 1947 to 1949, when, despairing of that solution, policy makers turned to the United Nations

1. Akira Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 178; Stephen Ambrose, “The Failure of a Policy Rooted in Fear,” *The Progressive* 34 (November 1970): 14-20; George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 395.



to provide justification for what was really a unilateral experiment in nation building in South Korea. And, third, the "short fuse" period of 1949 to 1950, when, in the aftermath of the "loss" of China, American policy makers made ready to repel any further assaults upon their Asian policy and positions. In each of these periods, however, the choices before the decision makers were never entirely clear cut. Indeed, throughout the entire era, serious consideration was given to the "bug out" option, given the difficulties of persuading the Koreans to have patience with American efforts, the limitations of American military power, or the distaste and/or distrust Syngman Rhee engendered in Washington.

When the trusteeship idea first emerged, as Cumings points out, it did so in the context of a much expanded concept of American security. In Roosevelt's mind it also contained elements not simply of a desire to contain revolutionary nationalism, but of a more generalized Wilsonian concept of collective security. It is significant that Roosevelt took the initiative in 1942 to offer the Soviet Union an "equal" partnership in the postwar world organization before he had himself decided exactly what form that organization would take. Robert Dallek and Martin Sherwin, as well as Michael Schaller, have all discussed FDR's China policy as a complex mixture of traditional hopes for America's oldest friend combined with a more pragmatic realization that with Japan's defeat the way would be open to Russian expansion in Asia. Clearly, FDR was seeking to involve the Soviets in what Richard Nixon would call much later the structure of peace. To do so, he would employ whatever tools were at hand. For Korea that meant an attempt at international trusteeship.

This was what Cumings has described as "high policy" to distinguish what Washington hoped from the realities of what existed in Korea, the determinants of "low policy." From 1943, as he points out, the State Department was concerned with the relationship of "Korea's political development" to the future security of northern Asia. On August 18, 1943, Max Bishop of the Far Eastern Division circulated a memorandum, "The USSR in the Far East," to his colleagues that outlined both sets of considerations.

It was quite likely, he began, that the Russians would use "free" movements sponsored by the Soviet government in Asia in the same fashion as the "free" German, Polish and Yugoslav movements in Europe. "It is believed," he asserted, "that Korean guerrillas operating in Manchuria have close Soviet connections." Russian motivations operated on two levels. On the ideological level the Soviets were suspicious of all revolutionary movements that they did not control, and

were determined "to gain control of social and economic movements which might be termed revolutionary in the orthodox sense of that term." Added to this motivation, however, was the perennial Russian longing for warm-water ports.

Very likely Moscow would seek as a basic objective, "access to the Pacific through a port in north China or in Korea on the Yellow Sea." Very likely also, Russia would not feel it necessary to "annex" such a port in either China or Korea "provided that territory were under a government of which the Russian Government approved and upon which it felt it could rely—in other words, a government more or less similar to that in Outer Mongolia." What complicated matters for American policy makers was that postwar conditions in China and the Far East threatened, because of the chaos the Japanese would leave behind and the tendency "on the part of authorities in the area concerned . . . to place the blame for their own failures at the doorstep of Moscow as the instigator of social unrest," to embroil the United States in a Soviet-American confrontation.<sup>2</sup>

Russia's ability to disrupt any settlement it disapproved prompted, I believe, the desire to pursue the trusteeship plan as well as the conclusion that it would be the height of folly to become involved in support of the Kuomintang once it became clear that civil war could not be avoided in China. Yet it was already recognized that to implement the Korean trusteeship or not to participate in the Chinese civil war would be next to impossible. Hence Roosevelt's and Truman's reluctance to respond to Stalin's overtures for a discussion of the proposed Korean solution; hence also the Marshall mission to China.

For a time it seemed important that no discussions at all be held with Russia about the future of Korea. As John Carter Vincent wrote Secretary Stettinius on February 8, 1945, the Far Eastern Division was concerned about the possibility of Sino-Russian discussions of Korea's future. Both Great Britain and the United States had a definite interest in Korea, and any talks would have to be multilateral.<sup>3</sup> This was reminiscent of Secretary Stimson's fear of Sino-Japanese negotiations in 1911. In both instances the primary goal was to make sure that China did not unite with another power in any arrangement that would exclude American interests.

"It appears that if Manchuria and perhaps North China are not to pass to Chinese control, but rather to pass to Soviet control or separate

2. "The USSR in the Far East," Aug. 18, 1943, Charles Bohlen Papers, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

3. Vincent to Stettinius, Feb. 8, 1945, Records of the China Office, Department of State, National Archives.



states under its domination in a progression of circumstances," the secretaries of war and navy warned on November 26, 1945, "then Russia will have achieved in the Far East approximately the objectives Japan initially set out to accomplish."<sup>4</sup> Was it not at least as serious, the service leaders asked, to risk that possibility as it was to aid Chiang K'ai-shek to assert control over such areas? The Marshall mission was the response to such criticism, but, as China passed under Communist domination, that effort came to symbolize America's apparent paralysis in the face of Russian expansion.

Put another way, the dilemma appeared that the United States needed Russia to implement its own plans, but involving the Soviets meant an unacceptable increase of Russian influence—both territorially and politically. The dilemma produced a series of anomalies such as the Marshall mission that were foredoomed to failure, and which disturbed domestic politics in the United States in ways that helped to produce the Korean War. What this comes down to is, I believe, that Cumings has provided us with an insight into this 1943-47 "trusteeship" period that better accounts for American policy in the Far East than Professor Iriye's elaboration on the "Yalta System" as an understanding of post-war Russian-American relations in Asia. The cold war did indeed come early to Asia.

Was there any way the trusteeship plan could have worked? My own feeling is it would not have worked under any conditions; but there does exist evidence that Russian behavior in Korea was shaped by American occupation policy in Japan even earlier than George Kennan suggests. Cumings has not explored this avenue in his paper, but perhaps he will be willing to comment at some point on the impact that exclusion of the Soviets from any real say in Japan may have had on their policy toward Korea.

The State Department's growing feeling that the United States had a political "strategic" interest in Korea, which coincides with the decision to move the question to the United Nations (Cumings's second period, 1947-49), finds the political officers in the State Department and the military leaders in the Pentagon in new positions. Whereas in 1945 it was war and navy that wanted a strong stand to prevent Soviet hegemony in northern Asia, two years later it is the State Department demanding that the gates be barred to Russian expansion into Korea and elsewhere, except China, where Marshall's failure had left a thick layer of gloom over all discussions of that sorry tangle.

Appearing before an executive session of the Senate Foreign Rela-

1. Secretaries of war and navy to the secretary of state, Nov. 26, 1945, *ibid.*

lations Committee to defend the president's request for funds to initiate the Truman Doctrine, Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson voiced the strongest commitment to date to securing Korea for the free world. It was true, he began, that there were parts of the world where the United States could not do anything effective, areas within the perimeter of Russian physical force. "There are other places where we can be effective. One of them is Korea, and I think that is another place where the line has been clearly drawn between the Russians and ourselves." That was, as the saying goes, a real mouthful. Apparently the senators were as struck with this definition of the new doctrine as I was in 1973 when these hearings were finally released to the public, because there follows the tantalizing (and frustrating) parenthetical comment, "Discussion was off the record."<sup>5</sup>

What Acheson said "off the record" could not diminish, I think, the shock he had produced by mentioning Korea as a logical and prominent area for application of the Truman Doctrine. His testimony produced quite dramatic reactions. Senator Elbert Thomas of Utah rejected the notion of refighting the Crimean War to keep Russia out of the Middle East, but hinted he would be supportive of an effort to preserve "the remarkable peace we brought about in the Far East." Senator Walter George of Georgia had a very different reaction. "I do not see how we are going to escape going into Manchuria, North China, and Korea and doing things in that area of the world. . . . You go down to the end of the road."<sup>6</sup>

Cumings has mentioned in passing the \$600 million the State Department wanted for its demonstration project in Korea. Certainly this was enough to convince any remaining doubters that the administration was indeed serious about whatever it was Acheson had told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on or off the record. The British were amazed at the audacity of American policy shifts toward Korea. For months, of course, the Labour Government had been concerned about the painful slowness of the Truman administration to come to grips with the deepening European crisis. Now the air was fairly crackling with the latest about American determination to resist Russian expansion. We had heard about the proposed appropriation for Korea, minuted by M.E. Denning on March 26, 1947, but only that afternoon he had had a conversation with Everett Drumwright of the embassy that elaborated on the American position. "This gauntlet has not

5. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings: A Bill to Provide for Assistance to Greece and Turkey*, 80th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 22.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-44, 198.



yet been flung into the arena," noted Denning, but Drumwright had assured him that the administration "has a firm intention to go ahead."<sup>7</sup>

Denning wondered if the Americans realized that money alone was not enough. Apparently the feeling that the United States had to meet the Russians head on in Korea now that the trusteeship plan was past praying for overshadowed all else: "... it is a bold move, but its success is by no means assured." Perhaps, he mused, the administration thought that with the commitment announced in this fashion, the Russians would see the handwriting on the wall and retreat from Korea. What would happen if the Russians did not oblige? Are they prepared to carry the struggle to its ultimate conclusion? "I cannot help wondering whether they have thought this all out. But the grant-in-aid to Korea does suggest that the challenge is of world-wide application."<sup>8</sup>

The answer to Denning's questions—and to the concerns of Senators Thomas and George—as suggested by Cumings, would seem to be equivocal. Yes, policy makers knew they had flung the gauntlet down, but they were by no means sure of what else they had to fling into the arena. Military objections, Cumings points out, were never the determining factor. By late 1947 and thereafter, Japan's security and rehabilitation had become major considerations; but I wonder if it is correct to suggest, as Cumings does (again in passing) to dramatize this shift that in 1940 it would have been inconceivable to believe the State Department would have been very interested "in this little peninsula" without qualifying the statement in a somewhat different way than he does in his paper.

By this I mean to suggest that by 1947 Korea had become ideologically much more than a little peninsula off on the periphery of the policy maker's vision. While Japan's survival as a non-Communist industrial workshop of Asia was certainly a major consideration, this strategic question carried with it certain perceptions of the world. I find it interesting, for example, that in 1938 and after, when Dean Acheson returned to government (having convinced himself apparently that the Axis menace to civilization was somewhat greater than FDR's decision to abandon the gold standard) his major preoccupation with Asian policy was not the desire to "save" China—but rather to prevent Japan from denying the "white man" access to the region. Korea, as he said, was one place where the line had been clearly drawn.

Summing up my response to Cumings's second period, 1947-49, I find it an advance on Stephen Ambrose's argument that war in Korea

7. Minutes, Mar. 26, 1947, FO 371, Public Record Office, London [UN 2001/1754/78].

8. Ibid.

unleashed previously frustrated urges to a more active engagement in Europe and Asia. Accompanied as it was by the administration's determination to strengthen its commitment to South Korea, the decision to take the matter to the United Nations (like the Truman Doctrine itself) was evidence of the increasing stake the United States had in nation building as a means of blocking Soviet expansionism.

Unfortunately, as American policy makers saw it, Syngman Rhee was determined to follow the same disastrous path taken by Chiang K'ai-shek. How was this new obstacle to American policy to be overcome? As the result of several meetings between Acheson and his Far Eastern experts and outside consultants in the aftermath of the Communist victory in China, the following general thesis was set forth: "We should seek to insure that the general revolutionary movement in this area, through which the indigenous peoples are endeavoring to attain national independence and improved conditions of life, is not captured by Moscow. In areas in which the movement has already been captured by Moscow, we should seek to free it."<sup>9</sup>

Did that thesis mandate a rollback policy in Korea? Here we are confronted by the intriguing and conflicting evidence Cumings presents. In the memorandum I have just cited, there were certain areas identified as places where America's role had been a "key factor." These included—without a priority assigned for purposes of their discussion—Japan, Korea, Okinawa, and the Philippines. These places should be considered "demonstration projects"—where conditions must be such as to attest to the beneficence of American influence. Recognition of Communist China was not, the memorandum stated, to be considered as a method for dealing with Asian problems. But about Korea, the decision was less confident and certain. A commitment to Korean territorial integrity was out of the question; but, on the other hand, the Korean government must not be allowed to fail.

Whether Korea "failed" or not was, unfortunately, not within Washington's control. But the consequences were likely to be serious indeed. How could the United States hope to have influence in Japan or Southeast Asia if, following the debacle in China, another country such as Korea managed to distort American influence into a blundering domestic policy that could neither offer citizens democratic rights, or, what was worse, safety from their enemies? Suppose Rhee initiated a rollback policy on his own? What a fine example that would be of the evil policy of "Western imperialism"! If he won, criticism in Asia

9. "Decisions Reached by Consensus at the Meetings with the Secretary and the Consultants on the Far East," Nov. 2, 1949, Records of the China Office, National Archives.



(and in Europe) would weaken America's ideological front. If he lost, well, that was even worse to contemplate. Certainly John Foster Dulles thought that was the most likely danger. And he attempted to extract a promise from Truman before accepting the assignment to write the Japanese peace treaty that the administration would show its determination in Asia by defending whatever spot the Communists chose to attack next, regardless of military considerations, to demonstrate to those peoples that communism was not the wave of the future.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout this last period, the "short fuse" from 1949 to June 25, 1950, Americans were not certain they could fight a limited war in Asia. Aside from the presumed difficulties of supporting Rhee in an offensive operation, there was the "tripwire" problem. In Europe, NATO was based upon the assumption that America's atomic monopoly, and the alliance, would hold in check overt Russian aggression against the West. A similar assumption prevailed in Asia, with a crucial difference. There was no Far Eastern counterpart to NATO. So while the existence of NATO seemed to guarantee an American response, despite the Russian development of an atomic bomb, would Washington risk atomic war for Korea? Interestingly enough, however, the opposite side of the picture provided policy makers in Washington with a more serious concern. If the United States did not respond in Korea by accepting a limited war, would the atomic deterrent in Europe lose credibility?

Cumings implies, but does not conclude, that American policy in these months developed along lines somewhere between James K. Polk's maneuverings before the Mexican War and Franklin Roosevelt's concern that the Japanese fire the first shot. Acheson was certainly thinking about a Far Eastern pact, to resolve at least one of the difficulties listed above, but the problem was that proponents of such a plan in Congress were also determined to protect Chiang on Formosa. That was only one of several complications standing in the way of a Far Eastern pact. The genuinely revolutionary movements the United States wanted to encourage, as per the November 1949 memorandum, were appalled by Chiang, while the administration's critics were determined to stand by the beleaguered old man whose realm had been so cruelly reduced to the island of Formosa.

On March 21, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson met with Representative Christian Herter. Herter was troubled by the false sense of security that seemed so pervasive throughout the land. To

check the deterioration in the world situation would require, said the congressman, one last offer to negotiate Soviet-American differences. Should the Russians refuse, then "we should label them the barbarians they are," force them out of the United Nations, and break off diplomatic relations. Acheson did not feel things had quite reached that point, but he admitted that the past six to nine months had seen a trend developing that, if allowed to continue, would lead to a considerable deterioration in the American position.

The Russians were bent on world domination, but the United States could not afford to take the initiative in policies that would drive its allies into opposition, leaving us "thoroughly confused politically and economically." Well, said Herter, what could be done to arouse the American people short of breaking relations with the Soviet government? "I replied that I do not believe it will be necessary to create such a situation, the chances are too good that the Russians will do so themselves." Listing several ways this might come about, Acheson came to the Asian situation. "Finally, I referred to the possibility of an overall attack on Formosa from the mainland of China where we understand air strips are being built, Soviet planes are being furnished, and Soviet crews are training Chinese crews."<sup>11</sup>

The attack came in Korea, of course, but it served the purpose. The point to be remembered, I believe, about both Formosa and Korea is that the administration was ready to consider coming to terms with Communist China, if Mao somehow managed to avoid pitfalls. If he should launch an over-all attack, as Acheson said, then the American people would quickly forget about their differences over Asian policy, and the administration could make good use of the "mistake" to further its other policy goals. No doubt such an attack would solidify the western alliance as well, and impress Asian neutrals.

Cumings has demonstrated, it seems to me, the reasons why North Korea moved as it did in June 1950. I would have liked to know more about the situation in that half of the country in 1945 to 1950. Did American intelligence assume that the dynamics of North Korea were nothing more, as an American briefing officer put it after the attack, than the relationship of Walt Disney and Donald Duck? What, in other words, kept Kim Il-sung in power?

From Ambassador Alan Kirk in Moscow came an instant analysis that jibes well with Dean Acheson's explanation to Representative Herter. The Russians, he said, probably were not ready to risk an all-out war with the West. "Kremlin's Korean adventure thus offers

10. Memoranda of Apr. 28 and May 18, 1950, John Foster Dulles Papers, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J.

11. Conversation between the secretary and Representative Herter," Mar. 24, 1950, Dean Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo.



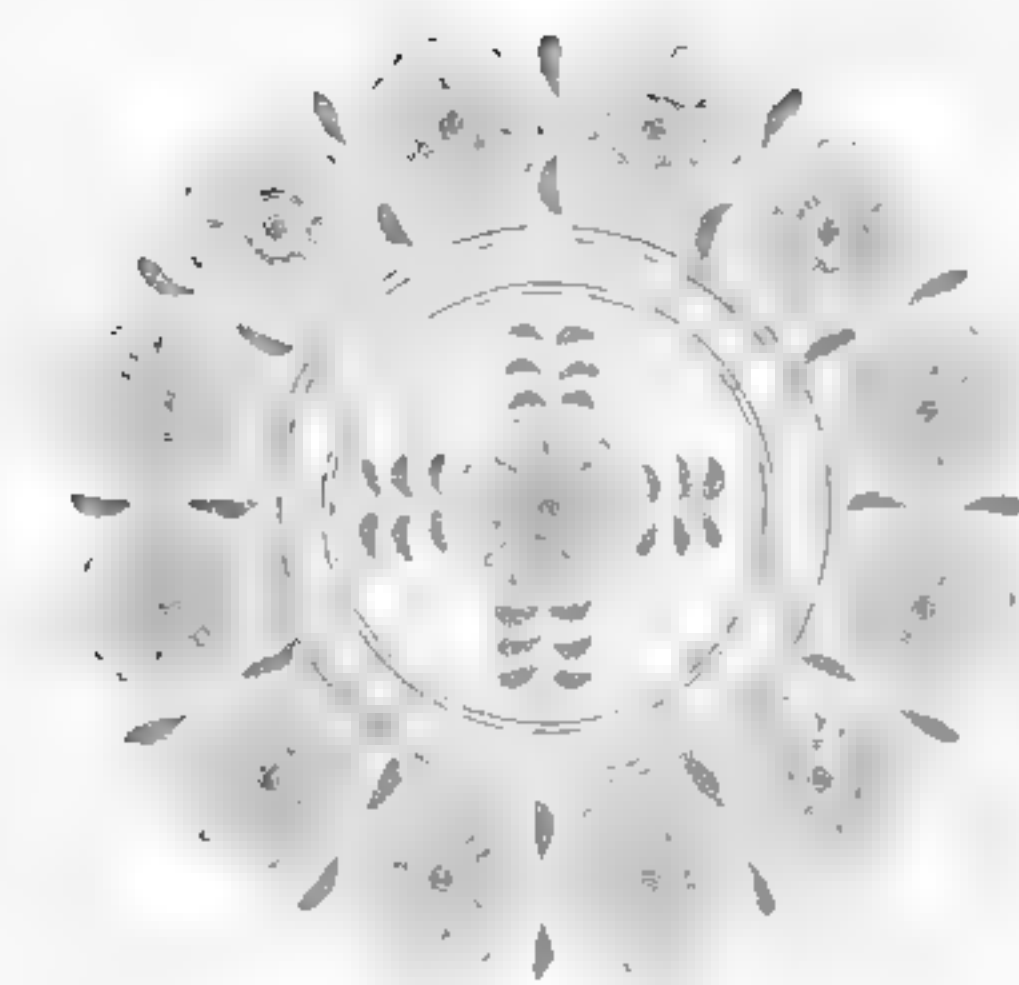
us opportunity to show that we mean what we say by talking of firmness, and at same time, to unmask present important Soviet weaknesses before eyes world and particularly Asia where popular concept Soviet power grossly exaggerated as result recent Soviet political and propaganda successes that area."<sup>12</sup>

Let me come back, in conclusion, to the comment I made at the outset. American policy makers gave as an official explanation for the response to the North Korean attack the argument that here was a testing ground, a place apparently chosen by the enemy to probe America's will and determination. Acheson believed that, even as he believed that he could seize upon the attack to launch a counteroffensive in Europe. In 1919 Secretary of State Robert Lansing wrote a long memorandum to Woodrow Wilson in which he made the argument that it was possible to separate the Bolshevik from Bolshevism. The former constituted a small minority that had seized power in Russia and turned it into a military dictatorship. Bolshevism, on the other hand, grew out of the war and past abuses, and furnished many "misguided recruits" to the Bolsheviks. Bolshevism, by its nature, could not be conquered by force. But it was possible to defeat the Bolsheviks, and a terrible mistake to ignore any opportunity to do so.<sup>13</sup>

Acheson's updated reasoning went something like this: Whatever the political situation in North Korea or in South Korea, in the eyes of the world, the attack was a turning point. It had to be met if American predominance, or national security if one prefers, was to be preserved. As in 1919, the task was to defeat the Bolsheviks and resolve the problems that produced Bolshevism.

12. Kirk to Acheson, June 25, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976), 7:139.

13. Lansing to Wilson, Dec. 3, 1919, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Princeton University Library.



## Diplomacy Delayed: The Atomic Bomb and the Division of Korea, 1945

MARK PAUL

AFTER THE YALTA CONFERENCE EARLY IN 1945, HOPES FOR AN ENDURING peace following the defeat of the Axis powers seemed bright. "We really believed in our hearts that this was the dawn of the new day we had been praying for and talking about for so many years," Harry Hopkins later remembered. "We were absolutely certain that we had won the first great victory of the peace."<sup>1</sup> Such hopes were soon eclipsed by dark shadows of doubt. By the time of Franklin Roosevelt's death in April 1945, American leaders began to fear that the Soviet Union would use its power in Eastern Europe and Northeast Asia to exclude American influence and reshape those regions in ways inimical to American political and economic ideals. In this atmosphere of anxiety, with the war in Europe near an end and Soviet entry into the Pacific conflict only months away, President Harry S. Truman and his advisers reconsidered the meaning of the Yalta agreements and the future of the cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union.

1. Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948), p. 870.



Although Korea itself was not often a matter of direct concern to these leaders, it was caught up in this reexamination. Northeast Asia was one of the two areas of the globe where the forces of the United States and the Soviet Union would meet. It was also a region where the interests of the two nations potentially clashed. The Yalta agreements had defined the extent of Soviet expansion in the region, but in light of Soviet behavior behind Red Army lines in Eastern Europe, American policy makers worried whether the Russians would interpret the often ambiguous agreement as license to dominate. Because of its vagueness, the Korean trusteeship plan Roosevelt and Stalin had verbally approved at Yalta presented a similar problem: How would a four-power trusteeship operate? What measures were needed to assure that no other nation would dominate Korea to the exclusion of American ideals and interests? Also unanswered was the question of military occupation of the peninsula. Soviet military occupation of Korea, Washington realized, would surely affect the political future of the nation. The casual agreement made by Roosevelt and Stalin had addressed none of these issues, leaving them to future negotiations.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the Japanese surrender in August 1945, these issues remained unresolved. Despite the anxieties in Washington over the prospects for Soviet-American cooperation, the American determination to stand up more forcefully to Soviet demands, and the possibility that the Russians would seek to control Korea, American leaders made no efforts to clarify the terms of the Korean trusteeship. From Roosevelt's policy of seeking immediate, explicit Soviet commitments to cooperate with the American design in the Far East, the Truman administration, less confident that Russian ambitions in Asia were limited, gradually turned to a policy of delaying any settlement of issues until the United States was in a stronger position to resist Soviet claims and to pursue its own interests. As a result, Korea emerged from World War II divided into two occupation zones, with an uncertain future in a world whose new day of peace had been all too short.

## 1

The hopes spawned by the Yalta Conference died almost as soon as it became necessary to put the agreements into practice. Once again, the United States and the Soviet Union quarreled over the composition

2. Awareness of these issues was reflected in materials prepared in the State Department. See U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1944 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 5: 1224-42. See also *FRUS, Yalta*, pp. 359-61; *FRUS, Potsdam*, 1:310-15.

of the Polish government, dimming the prospects for postwar cooperation. "I have . . . been watching with anxiety and concern the development of Soviet attitudes since the Crimea Conference," President Roosevelt informed British Prime Minister Churchill at the end of March 1945. "I am acutely aware of the dangers inherent in the present course of events not only for the immediate issues involved and our decisions at Crimea but for the San Francisco Conference and future world cooperation."<sup>3</sup> Despite these dangers, Roosevelt had apparently decided in the last days of his life to stand firmly on his interpretation of the Yalta agreement on Poland. When he died, the new president, Harry S. Truman, relying on the counsel of advisers who had long wanted a firmer policy toward the Soviet Union, moved rapidly toward a diplomatic confrontation on the issue.<sup>4</sup>

This renewed controversy fanned suspicions that spread across all areas of U.S.-Soviet relations, including the Far East. President Roosevelt had been aware of possible Soviet designs in Asia, yet he believed that the Yalta agreements would confine the Russians to limited gains and secure their support for Chiang K'ai-shek's government in China. At Yalta, Roosevelt had taken a risk, but there had been no acceptable alternative: China was weak and divided, and he thought he would need Russian help to defeat the Japanese and persuade the rival parties in China to unify. But in April, with Roosevelt gone and tensions about Poland high, to some leaders this risk seemed too great. Shortly after Roosevelt died, Ambassador Averell Harriman returned to Washington to warn the new president of the Soviet "barbarian invasion of Europe" and urge him to abandon "the illusion that for the immediate future the Soviet government was going to act in accordance with the principles which the rest of the world held to in international affairs."<sup>5</sup> Harriman's warning applied to Asia as well as Europe. Although only days earlier he had heard Stalin promise Soviet support for American policy in China, Harriman doubted that the Russians would live up to the Yalta agreements. He was convinced that if American efforts did not produce a united Chinese government "friendly" to the Soviets, Stalin would support the Chinese Communists in setting up a puppet regime in Manchuria and North China.

Other officials had similar fears. In a telegram from Moscow, Chargé George Kennan questioned the assumption by Patrick Hurley,

1. Roosevelt to Churchill, Mar. 29, 1945, Map Room Files, Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.

4. Barton J. Bernstein, "American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War," in *The Politics and Policies of the Truman Administration*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1976), pp. 23-27.

5. *FRUS, 1945*, 5:232-33.



ambassador to China, that Stalin would "unqualifiedly" support American policy in China. Words mean different things to Stalin than they do to Americans, Kennan explained: When Stalin endorsed a free, united, democratic China, the Russian leader meant a nation under Communist domination, friendly to the Soviet Union. The Russians would see "maximum power with minimum responsibility" in Asia by exerting pressure—more likely by veiled rather than direct methods—upon various areas deemed important to Soviet security. Although Kennan's analysis of Soviet ambitions was more measured than Harriman's, he too saw an urgent need to reconsider U.S. policy: "It would be tragic if our natural anxiety for Russian support at this stage, coupled with Stalin's cautious affability and his use of words which mean all things to all people, were to lead us into an undue reliance on Russian aid or even Russian acquiescence in the achievement of our long term objectives in China." Reading this message, Truman "realized only too well the implications. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

There was nothing novel in Harriman's and Kennan's alarms about Soviet behavior; both had harbored such fears for many months. But in the spring of 1945, a congruence of events made possible a reconsideration of American policy. The long simmering dispute over Poland came to full boil, heating up anxieties about Russian intentions. Because of Roosevelt's death, these anxieties quickly came to play a role in policy making, since Truman was ill prepared to deal with foreign policy issues and unready to conduct the personal diplomacy of his predecessor. Heavily dependent on his advisers for an interpretation of what the Roosevelt foreign policy had been, and anxious to prove his leadership by being blunt and decisive, Truman found congenial the counsel to take a firmer stand in relations with the Soviets.

What gave these attitudes a fuller play in American policy making, however, were the changes in the military situation in the Far East. At the time of the Yalta meetings, Allied strategic plans still called for a Soviet attack on Manchuria to be coordinated with the U.S. invasion of Japan. This action, it was hoped, would prevent the transfer to Japan of the Kwantung army, thereby weakening the ability of the Japanese to resist the American thrust. The Soviet invasion, combined with air attacks mounted from bases in Siberia, was expected to contribute directly to shortening the war and saving American lives. By April 1945, though, American military leaders had revised their calculations. On April 24 the Joint Chiefs of Staff canceled plans for B-29

6. For Harriman's views on Russian aims in China, see *ibid.*, 7:341-42. Kennan's cable is in *ibid.*, pp. 342-44. Truman's reaction is quoted in Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Year of Decision* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), p. 85.

bases in the Amur River region of Siberia after discovering that the additional bomb tonnage provided by the airfields would not justify the effort needed to transport equipment to that distant area. More important, on the same date military planners concluded that because U.S. naval and air forces could shut off transport between Japan and the Asian mainland, "early Soviet entry into the war against Japan and attendant containing of the Kwangtung army is no longer necessary to make the invasion feasible."<sup>7</sup>

Now free of the military constraints that had made the concessions at Yalta seem essential, American leaders began to reconsider their policy in Northeast Asia. The most pressing issue was what to do about the Yalta accords. Roosevelt and Stalin had agreed to delay revealing the agreements to Chiang K'ai-shek, fearing that a breach of security in the Chinese capital would tip off the Japanese to the Soviets' intention to enter the war. By May 1945, however, much of the need for secrecy had passed: the Soviets had abrogated their treaty with the Japanese, and Chungking was rife with rumors of the approaching Soviet invasion. Citing these facts, Ambassador Hurley cabled Truman on May 10, arguing that the time had come to inform Chiang of the Yalta agreements.<sup>8</sup>

Hurley's cable precipitated an immediate flurry of activity in high policy-making circles. In the month since Roosevelt's death, leaders had entertained many doubts about the wisdom of American policy in the Far East. Navy Secretary James Forrestal had formulated the issues when, during a May 1 meeting with Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and acting Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew, he questioned the basic objectives of U.S. policy in the Pacific. "How far and how thoroughly do we want to beat Japan?" he had asked. "What is our policy on Russian influence? Do we desire a counterweight to that influence? And should it be China or should it be Japan?"<sup>9</sup> Now, with Hurley's message, Harriman hurried around Washington from the White House to the Pentagon to the State Department, arguing that the time had come to consider again what would be American policy on Russian entry into the war, the future of China and Korea, and the occupation of Japan. Truman replied to Hurley on May 12 with orders to keep the Yalta agreements secret until further notice.<sup>10</sup>

7. U.S. Department of Defense, *The Entry of the Soviet Union into the War against Japan: Military Plans, 1941-1945* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1955), pp. 28-41, 60-68; the quotation is from p. 67.

8. Hurley to Truman, May 10, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 7:865.

9. Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 52. Concerning the fear of Soviet intentions in Asia, see Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era* (2 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952), 2:1445-46.

10. Truman to Hurley, May 12, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 7:869. For Harriman's



During the next week policy makers looked again at their plans for the Far East. Following his May 12 meeting with Harriman and Forrestal, Joseph Grew answered Harriman's request for a definition of American policy by writing a memorandum to the secretaries of war and navy. The State Department believed, explained Grew, that the United States should seek from the Russians new commitments on the Far East prior to any American action to implement the Yalta agreements. The Soviets should be asked to push the Chinese Communists to accept unification under the leadership of Chiang K'ai-shek, and the United States should get a Soviet promise to honor the Cairo Declaration on territorial changes in the Far East and accept a four-power trusteeship in Korea. Having set forth the State Department's position, he posed the central issue:

1. Is the entry of the Soviet Union into the Pacific War at the earliest possible moment of such vital interest to the United States as to preclude any attempt by the United States Government to obtain Soviet agreement to certain desirable political objectives in the Far East prior to such entry?

2. Should the Yalta decision in regard to Soviet political desires in the Far East be reconsidered or carried into effect in whole or in part?<sup>11</sup>

Upon receiving Grew's memo, Stimson noted in his diary that "these are very vital questions and I am glad that the State Department has brought them up. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

After some "hard thinking," however, Stimson decided the rush to reassess policy in the Pacific was less opportune than he had first imagined. Stimson too had been disturbed by Soviet actions in Eastern Europe, and though he had been more cautious than Harriman or Forrestal in recommending policies that might lead to an early break with the Soviets, he had given careful thought to tactics that might get "a Russia that we could work with." As the events of 1945 unfolded, he had increasingly turned to the yet untested atomic bomb as the "master card" in America's relations with the Soviet Union. Now, in response to Grew's memorandum, he once again realized that the questions Grew had asked were "powerfully connected with our success with S-1 (the atomic bomb)."<sup>13</sup>

round of meetings, see Millis, *Forrestal Diaries*, pp. 55-56; Diary of William D. Leahy, May 11, 1945, William D. Leahy Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. 461-62.

11. Grew to Stimson and Forrestal, May 12, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 7:869-70; Grew to Stettinius, May 12, 1945, Joseph C. Grew Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

12. Diary of Henry L. Stimson, May 13, 1945, Stimson Papers, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

13. *Ibid.*, May 13, 14, 1945.

On May 14 Stimson discussed the Grew note with John McCloy, his assistant secretary:

I told him that my own opinion was that the time now and the method now to deal with Russia was to keep our mouths shut and let our actions speak for words. . . . I told him this was a place where we really held all the cards. I called it a royal straight flush and we musn't be a fool about the way we play it. They (the Russians) can't get along without our help and industries and we have coming into action a weapon which will be unique. Now the thing is not to get into unnecessary quarrels by talking too much and not to indicate any weakness by talking too much; let our actions speak for themselves.<sup>14</sup>

The following morning, Stimson, in a "pretty red hot session" with Grew, Forrestal, and Harriman, elaborated his argument for a delay in any discussions with the Soviets on Northeast Asia. "I tried to point out the difficulties which existed and I thought it premature to ask those [Grew's] questions; at least we were not yet in a position to answer them." If the United States found it necessary "to have it out with Russia" on China and Korea, it would be advantageous to do so from the strongest bargaining position. "Over any such tangled wave of problems the S-1 secret would be dominant. . . ." he told them. It "seems a terrible thing to gamble with such big stakes in diplomacy without having your master card in your hand."<sup>15</sup>

Although Grew and Harriman agreed to delay Harriman's return to Moscow "to think out these things a little bit harder," they were not swayed by Stimson's argument. Later that day they called on the president, urged him to consider meeting with Stalin and Churchill at an early date, and repeated their advice that reassessment of policy in the Far East should be completed before Harriman's departure for Moscow. The president agreed.<sup>16</sup> But the following day, May 16, Stimson visited the president to argue for delay. Believing that the atomic bomb would be the master card in America's diplomacy with the Russians, Stimson was troubled by the prospect of a Big Three meeting to discuss European and Far Eastern issues before the bomb was tested. "We shall probably hold more cards in our hands later, than now," he told the president. Truman apparently agreed.<sup>17</sup>

14. *Ibid.*, May 14, 1945.

15. *Ibid.*, May 15, 1945.

16. *FRUS*, Potsdam, 1:12.

17. Stimson to Truman, May 16, 1945, Stimson Papers, Yale University. See also Diary of Joseph Davies, May 21, 1945, Davies Papers, Library of Congress; and Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945. There remains considerable controversy over this point. Harriman has written that "it is utter nonsense to believe—as some historians apparently do—that Truman postponed the Potsdam Conference in order to have the bomb go off before the end of his meeting with Stalin" (Harriman,



It is important to recognize the meaning and logic behind Stimson's strategy, particularly as it applies to Far Eastern issues. At least one historian has seen this decision to delay the Big Three meeting as the beginning of a subtle strategy to postpone Sino-Soviet negotiations on the Yalta concessions and end the war in the Pacific before Soviet armies entered the fighting.<sup>18</sup> In truth, Stimson had far more modest aims. Unlike Grew and Harriman, who were pushing for an immediate, tough stand against the Soviets, Stimson recognized that the United States had little leverage over the Soviets in the Far East. He made clear his analysis in his reply to Grew's memo: "The concessions to Russia on Far Eastern matters which were made at Yalta are generally matters which are within the military power of Russia to obtain regardless of U.S. military action short of war." An effort to revise the Yalta agreements, even one backed by the threat of American non-compliance, would not, he believed, influence the Soviets. Nor would it create "much good will." This last consideration was important to Stimson, for he, like Truman and the military, still wished to have Soviet help in the Pacific. Soviet entry was no longer essential to the defeat of Japan, but it was desirable because "it will materially shorten the war and thus save American lives." Stimson had no objection to the State Department's attempt to get the Soviets to clarify their intentions in the Far East, but he doubted the Soviets would bow to American wishes.<sup>19</sup> If the United States and Russia were going to disagree over Northeast Asia, Stimson preferred to do so at the Big Three meeting when, as he put it in his diary, "we shall probably hold more cards in our hands."<sup>20</sup> Then the president and his advisers would know if the atomic bomb test had been a success, and they would be better able to judge how far the United States wanted to go to retain Soviet cooperation in the Pacific, and whether the bomb would be, as Stimson hoped, a valuable bargaining chip to obtain American objectives in Europe and Asia. Stimson was indeed counseling that the options be kept open for atomic diplomacy—he and Roosevelt had long seen the bomb as a potential political weapon—but his advice

*Special Envoy*, p. 490). Yet the evidence cited above seems to permit no other conclusion. For the best assessment of the evidence, see Barton J. Bernstein, "Roosevelt, Truman, and the Atomic Bomb, 1941-1945: A Reinterpretation," *Political Science Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (Spring 1975):41.

18. Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), pp. 95-116.

19. Stimson to Grew, May 21, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 7:876-78.

20. Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945.

was neither part of a strategy of delayed showdown nor a plan to keep the Soviets out of the war in the Pacific. It was instead the counsel of cautious realism, of recognizing that America's ability to realize its goals in Asia would rest ultimately on the balance of power between America and Russia.<sup>21</sup>

That Truman agreed with Stimson's reasoning should not seem surprising. The new president, in office for only one month, was unprepared for the diplomatic tasks he faced. From the first he was hit with an unending flow of problems and crises, each important and complex. Now, in the middle of May, he was being advised to re-examine the agreements on the Far East that had been made by his predecessor, and to meet immediately with Stalin. In these circumstances, it seems natural that Truman would have found Stimson's advice convincing. What president, new to his responsibilities and uncertain of his position, would have doubted his senior military adviser when told that he should not rush into serious negotiations without the weapon that would be his master card? Harriman and Grew were telling him to be bold and take risks; Stimson was asking him to be cautious and do nothing for the moment. Both as an approach for securing American interests and as an answer to his personal anxieties, Stimson's counsel sat well with Truman.<sup>22</sup>

The president was not content, however, to let the issues between the United States and the Soviet Union go unexplored. At Roosevelt's funeral and again early in May, he had asked Harry Hopkins to go to Moscow to sound out Russian attitudes and reassure Stalin that Roosevelt's death had not changed American policy. Originally conceived to break the stalemate over Poland, the Hopkins mission now became a convenient way for Truman to discover as well what intentions Stalin might have in the Far East. On May 19, Truman met with Hopkins to give him instructions for the mission. There is no adequate record of these instructions, but Truman later remembered that he had wanted Hopkins to get "as early a date as possible on Russian entry into the war against Japan," and to emphasize to Stalin that the United States expected the Russians to carry out their agreements. "I told Harry

21. See Bernstein, "Roosevelt, Truman, and the Atomic Bomb," pp. 39-42; and Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975).

22. See Sherwin, *A World Destroyed*, pp. 146-50, 186-92, for a sensitive portrayal of Truman's anxieties and their influence on these decisions.



he could use diplomatic language, or he could use a baseball bat if he thought that was [the] proper approach to Mr. Stalin."<sup>23</sup>

Hopkins also received from the State Department a list of desired "commitments and clarifications" on the Far East. In China, the State Department wanted detailed promises that the Soviets would refrain from using any but Chinese government military units in operations against Japan, respect Chinese territorial integrity, and use their influence with the Communists to speed Chinese political and military unification. The department also presented for the first time a detailed proposal for Korea's future. This called for a four-power trusteeship in Korea that would last for five years; during this time the trustees—Great Britain, China, the Soviet Union, and the United States—would be equally represented in all the bureaus of an interim Korean government. They would administer the country while training "reliable and capable *local* Koreans in the performance of various governmental and technical duties." All Allied armed forces, except a token force from each trustee, would be withdrawn upon the establishment of the trusteeship. Worried about Soviet domination of Northeast Asia, the State Department was asking Hopkins and Harriman to secure detailed assurances that the Russians would not seek such gains.<sup>24</sup>

Hopkins's discussions with Stalin on the Far East produced, in late May, a reaffirmation of Russian intentions to adhere to the Yalta accords. In their third meeting, on the evening of May 28, Stalin told Truman's emissary that Soviet forces would be ready to attack the Japanese by August 8, though the date of the invasion would depend on having secured a treaty with the Chinese. Stalin agreed once again that China should be unified under Chiang K'ai-shek's leadership, and he told his American visitors that only the United States would have sufficient resources to play an important economic role in postwar

23. Appointment book of Matthew Connelly, May 19, 1945, President's Secretary's Files (hereafter PSF), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo. The origin of the Hopkins mission is still somewhat hazy. The account here follows Truman's recollection (Truman, *Year of Decision*, pp. 257-59). However Harriman and Charles Bohlen say that the idea of sending Hopkins to Moscow was Bohlen's, that Truman opposed the idea, but later relented. See Harriman, *Special Envoy*, p. 459; Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 215; Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, pp. 885-87. See also Truman's note in Connelly appointment book, May 18, 1945, PSF, Truman Papers.

24. *FRUS, 1945*, 7:878-83 (emphasis in the original). Hopkins was also provided Stimson's May 21 reply to Grew's question; see Grew to Forrestal, May 21, 1945, Grew Papers, Harvard University.

China. On the delicate issue of Soviet military action and its relation to the Chinese domestic struggle, the Soviet leader said that even if unification had not been achieved before Russian entry, the Kuo-mintang would be allowed to set up civil administrations in areas controlled by the Red Army. Stalin also repeated his support for a four-power trusteeship in Korea.<sup>25</sup> None of these discussions of Far Eastern issues was as detailed as the State Department memorandum, but even the skeptical Harriman was pleased with the results. It was decided not to pursue Far Eastern issues further.<sup>26</sup>

Truman also welcomed the news from Moscow. Happy to have a date for Russian entry into the war and reassured that the Soviets would support American leadership in Asia, Truman boasted to Stimson on June 6 of Hopkins's accomplishments. But Truman and Stimson were not counting on Soviet assurances alone. Again they discussed the atomic bomb. The meeting of the Big Three had been delayed until July 16, Truman told Stimson, "to give us more time" for testing the new weapon. Agreeing with Stimson that *quid pro quos* should be established before the United States shared its atomic secret with the Russians, Truman mentioned Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Manchuria as areas where the bomb might prove a valuable bargaining counter. Although the final political outcome of the war in the Far East was still uncertain, Truman was optimistic, for he had the promise of Soviet cooperation and the prospect of a master card that could turn promise into reality.<sup>27</sup>

## II

By the time of the Potsdam Conference, it was clear to all American leaders that there was a pressing need for specific agreements with the Soviets that would safeguard American interests in Northeast Asia. This was particularly true in regard to Korea. The Russian attack on the Japanese was now less than a month away, and State Department officials—who had long recognized that a Soviet military occupation of the Korean peninsula could have undesirable effects there—were anxious to have a more comprehensive understanding of Korea's future. In June, in a policy paper prepared for Stimson, the department had predicted that "the Soviet Government will, no doubt, establish military government in the portion of Korea under its control and may

25. For the minutes of the Hopkins-Stalin talks, see *FRUS, Potsdam*, 1:41-47.

26. For the reaction of Harriman and Hopkins to their discussions with Stalin, see *ibid.*, pp. 61-62; and *FRUS, 1945*, 7:893.

27. Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945.



subsequently wish to establish a Korea regime friendly to the Soviet Union composed at least partially of Korean leaders groomed in the Soviet Union." Chaos and revolutionary ferment would likely follow the defeat of Japan, the State Department believed, and in this situation, "the policy and activities of a Russian-sponsored socialist regime in Korea might easily receive popular support."<sup>28</sup> To counter this possibility, the State Department sought prior agreement from the Soviets that the great powers would work in concert to prepare Korea for eventual independence, and it included this matter in its list of objectives to be achieved at the Potsdam Conference.<sup>29</sup>

The attitude displayed by the Russians in July in their discussions with the Chinese on the Yalta concessions had also sharpened American awareness that it was necessary to negotiate arrangements for Northeast Asia after the war. Taking advantage of the loose wording of the Yalta accords, Stalin had proposed to Chinese Foreign Minister T. V. Soong an agreement that went far beyond what American leaders considered legitimate Russian needs in Manchuria and that appeared to challenge the Open Door policy in China.<sup>30</sup> The Chinese government, looking to the Soviets for support in its internal struggle against the Communists, could not hope to withstand alone the Soviet pressures to permit Russian hegemony over portions of Manchuria. Nor could it protect the American interest in free commercial access to Manchurian ports and railways. Realizing that only U.S. action could prevent an eventual Sino-Soviet treaty inimical to the interests of both China and the United States, Truman and Secretary of State James F. Byrnes had moved to resist the Russian demands and involve the United States in what were ostensibly bilateral negotiations. On July 6, Byrnes had cabled Harriman—who was conferring with Soong throughout the negotiations—that the United States would expect to be consulted before any Sino-Soviet agreement was concluded. He had also backed the Chinese in their interpretation of the provision of the Yalta agree-

28. "An Estimate of Conditions in Asia and the Pacific at the Close of the War in the Far East and Objectives and Policies of the United States," June 22, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 6:556-80; the quotation is on p. 563.

29. Potsdam Briefing Papers, *FRUS, Potsdam*, 1:309-15. The Russians too saw a need for more discussions on Korea. Chinese Foreign Minister T. V. Soong reported to Harriman on July 3 that Stalin had agreed to a four-power trusteeship for Korea, but that Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov thought trusteeship "an unusual agreement" and believed "that therefore it would be necessary to come to a detailed understanding." *FRUS, 1945*, 7:914.

30. The course of the Sino-Soviet negotiations may be followed through Harriman's reports in *FRUS, 1945*, 7:910-15, 919-28, 932-34. For a State Department analysis of the Yalta agreements that recognizes the ambiguities in the document, see *ibid.*, pp. 935-42.

ments on Outer Mongolia and the Manchurian railways.<sup>31</sup> Stalin's expansive interpretation of the Yalta accords underlined the immediate need for the United States to discuss the Far East with the Russians and reinforced Truman's desire to reach an understanding on Northeast Asia at Potsdam.<sup>32</sup>

As the American delegation to the Potsdam Conference came together in the middle of July, Far Eastern issues occupied the attention of many policy makers. Averell Harriman, arriving from Moscow and the recently suspended negotiations between Soong and Stalin, "was much worked up over his fears of the Russian plans for Manchuria and wanted help."<sup>33</sup> A week earlier, on July 9, he had suggested, with Byrnes's agreement, that the State Department prepare for use at Potsdam a study of the American interpretation of the Yalta agreements and the proposed Korean trusteeship.<sup>34</sup>

Henry Stimson was equally concerned. Prime advocate of the policy of delaying negotiations on the Far East until the Big Three conference, Stimson now used every opportunity to impress upon the president and secretary of state the importance of these issues. On July 16 he presented to Truman a memorandum dealing with the end of the war and the subsequent political arrangements. He urged the president to see that "no concessions should be made which would permit Russia to control or prohibit trade through Dairen or any other commercial port in Manchuria." Such concessions, he warned, would mean abandoning the Open Door policy and endangering "our clear and growing

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 914, 916-17. It has been argued that Byrnes and Truman intervened in the Sino-Soviet discussions to stall the negotiations, hoping thereby to delay or prevent Soviet entry into the war (Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, pp. 101-26, especially 120-26). This is incorrect. Prior to Potsdam, American leaders still wanted Soviet intervention (see the record of Truman's June 18 meeting with his military advisers, *FRUS, Potsdam*, 1:903-10). There is no evidence that, before Potsdam, the United States wished to stall the negotiations; on the contrary, Harriman tried to convince Soong of the importance of obtaining an agreement before Soviet troops entered Manchuria, and he suggested that the terms Chiang had offered for the ports at Dairen and Port Arthur were not sufficiently generous. (*FRUS, 1945*, 7:924-26.) Byrnes's purpose in stiffening the Chinese position was not to delay a settlement, but to assure an agreement compatible with Chinese and American interests in Manchuria. With the scheduled Soviet offensive still more than a month away, it seems extremely unlikely that Byrnes was hoping that his actions could affect the date of Russian entry into the war. It was not until later in the month that he saw a chance to make this tactic work.

32. For indications that Truman intended to discuss these matters with Stalin, see *ibid.*, pp. 899, 906-7; Stimson Diary, June 6, 1945.

33. Stimson Diary, July 15, 1945.

34. *FRUS, 1945*, 7:924, 934-42.



interest in the orient." He also suggested that the Korean trusteeship idea be pressed and, contrary to Stalin's wish that no foreign troops be stationed there, he wanted at least a token American force on the peninsula during the four-power regime:

The Russians . . . have already trained one or two divisions of Koreans, and, I assume, intend to use them in Korea. If an international trusteeship is not set up in Korea, and perhaps even if it is, these Korean divisions will probably gain control, and influence the setting up of a Soviet dominated local government, rather than an independent one. This is the Polish question transplanted to the Far East.<sup>35</sup>

The next morning, he met with Byrnes and again advised that the United States oppose Stalin's plans to make Manchuria an exclusive Russian economic sphere.<sup>36</sup>

The talks Stimson advocated were never held. In the two weeks of negotiations at Potsdam, Truman and Stalin discussed the Far Eastern situation only once. In that brief session Stalin summarized the Soviet position on the Soong negotiations and Truman and Byrnes offered an occasional query, no more. The president abandoned his plans to obtain from the Russians an agreement to abide by the American interpretation of the Yalta accords. He did this despite numerous suggestions from Stimson, Harriman, and State Department officers that American interests required opposing Stalin's demands in Manchuria and reaching a more detailed understanding on the Korean trusteeship. When the meetings ended early in August, these matters were still unresolved.

What is the explanation for this surprising omission? Why, after having delayed detailed discussions of these matters until the Big Three meeting, did Truman leave Potsdam without settling them? The key is the atomic bomb. In May, Truman had postponed talking to the Russians about the Far East until he knew whether the bomb worked. Now, in July, the success of the atomic bomb test became the occasion for a reconsideration of policy in the Far East, out of which grew a new strategy of delay.

The American party at Potsdam received its initial news of the successful atomic test on July 16. As detailed reports replaced the first sketchy messages, policy makers were sure that the diplomatic situation had been decisively transformed. Since the spring, American leaders had understood that the bomb would powerfully influence

35. Stimson's memo is reprinted in sections in *FRUS, Potsdam*, 2; the portions quoted are from pp. 631, 1223-24. See also Stimson Diary, July 16, 1945.

36. Stimson Diary, July 17, 1945.

the whole complex of issues involved with the end of the Pacific war: the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, the Japanese surrender, the future of Asia. But as Stimson later recalled, "the bomb as a merely probable weapon had seemed a weak reed on which to rely, but the bomb as colossal reality was very different."<sup>37</sup> The news from Alamo-gordo greatly cheered the president and gave him "new confidence." According to Stimson, "the president was tremendously pepped up by it and spoke to me of it again and again."<sup>38</sup>

Buoyed by his new confidence, Truman was now ready to reconsider the American course of action in the Far East. One of his primary objectives in going to Potsdam had been to get full Russian assistance against the Japanese. Now Truman wondered if the United States might dispense with Soviet aid. On July 23, Truman told Stimson that he was eager to learn from General Marshall whether the United States needed the Russians in the war. After discussing the matter with the chief of staff, Stimson reported the next day that Marshall believed "that the Russians were not needed."<sup>39</sup> This opinion greatly changed Truman's conception of his task at Potsdam. There was no longer any reason for the president to go ahead with his effort to bring the Russians into the war; as Stimson later recalled, the bomb "made it clear to the Americans that further diplomatic efforts to bring the Russians into the Pacific war were largely pointless."<sup>40</sup> Russian entry promised no benefits and threatened to put the Soviets in a position to dominate Manchuria and Korea. Indeed, no longer needing the Russians, the Americans wished the Soviets would stay out: "It is quite clear that the United States do not at the present time desire Russian participation in the war against Japan," Churchill cabled London on July 23.<sup>41</sup>

If the bomb created a consensus among American leaders that Soviet participation in the Pacific war was no longer needed or desired, it did not lead to similar agreement about how they should deal with unresolved matters in Northeast Asia. Stimson, Harriman, and officials from the State Department still believed that it was necessary at Potsdam to come to a firm understanding with the Russians so that American goals would be clear. Even though the president believed that his first conversation with Stalin "had clinched the Open Door in Manchuria," Stimson urged Truman to discuss the matter with Stalin

37. Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), p. 637.

38. Stimson Diary, July 23, 24, 1945.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service*, p. 637.

41. Churchill is quoted in John Ehrman, *Grand Strategy: October, 1944 to August, 1945* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1956), p. 292.



"detail by detail" to leave no room for Russian misunderstanding.<sup>42</sup> Harriman reminded Byrnes that the Sino-Soviet talks were at an impasse, that the Chinese could not resist by themselves Stalin's demands, and that the United States must present to Stalin its interpretation of the Yalta agreements if it hoped to protect its interests in Manchuria. "Although it may not be desirable for us at this time to show any concern over the question of Russia's entry into the war against Japan," Harriman wrote, "it would seem that there are substantial advantages in the reestablishment of friendly relations between the Soviet Union and China, particularly the agreement that the Soviet Government will support the Chinese National Government as the unifying force in China."<sup>43</sup> Although neither Stimson nor Harriman was happy with the prospect of the Soviets invading Manchuria and Korea, neither thought that the Soviets could be kept from getting into the war when it served Russian interests. They believed firm agreement with the Russians might limit Soviet influence in Manchuria and protect the interests of both the United States and Chiang K'ai-shek.

Secretary Byrnes, however, opposed further negotiations. He saw no promise in Stimson's and Harriman's efforts to bring the Soviets to acceptable terms; Stalin would be satisfied only through "radical concessions" by the Chinese.<sup>44</sup> Rejecting diplomacy, Byrnes pinned his hopes on a rapid end to the war. As he told Forrestal on July 28, he was "anxious to get a Japanese surrender before the Russians got into the war, hoping thereby to deny the Soviets control over Port Arthur and Dairen."<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, Byrnes devised diplomatic tactics to delay Soviet entry. His ploy involved the uncompleted negotiations over the Sino-Soviet treaty. "JFB [Byrnes] determined to outmaneuver Stalin on China," noted Walter Brown, Byrnes's aide, on July 20. "Hopes Soong will stand firm and then Russians will not go in war. Then he feels Japan will surrender before Russia goes to war and this will save China."<sup>46</sup> On July 23, Truman sent Chiang a message, prepared by Byrnes, that asked the Chinese to resume their negotiations

42. Stimson Diary, July 17, 18, 1945.

43. *FRUS, Potsdam*, 2:1243-44. Harriman had the support of other State Department officials at Potsdam including Donald Russell, special assistant to Byrnes, and John Carter Vincent, chief of the Division of Chinese Affairs; see *ibid.*, pp. 1227-30, 1241-43; also Harriman, *Special Envoy*, pp. 493-94.

44. Leahy Diary, July 16, 1945.

45. Millis, *Forrestal Diaries*, p. 78; James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), pp. 207-8.

46. "W. B.'s Notes," July 20, 1945, James F. Byrnes Papers, Cooper Library, Clemson University, Clemson, S.C. For Byrnes's account of this strategy, see his *All in One Lifetime* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958), p. 291.

with Stalin, while informing them that the United States did not expect them to extend concessions in excess of the Yalta agreements. The following day Brown noted that, "Byrnes still hoping for time, believing after atomic bombing Japan will surrender and Russia will not get in so much on the kill, thereby [not] being in a position to press for claims against China."<sup>47</sup> Having settled upon these tactics, Byrnes rejected the advice of Stimson and officials in the State Department that he negotiate further with the Russians.

Truman supported his secretary of state in this course of action. In spite of warnings that the Manchurian and Korean issues were still unsettled and without regard to Molotov's request on July 22 that the Big Three exchange views on Korea, Truman dropped these issues from discussion.<sup>48</sup> Whether the president shared Byrnes's hopes for delaying Soviet entry—as Byrnes later claimed—is unknown. Truman was undoubtedly aware that the Russians might enter the fighting without an agreement with China, and that it was within their power to take the concessions they wished.<sup>49</sup> He seems, however, to have seen some advantage to the United States in postponing settlement of the Manchurian and Korean issues until after Japan's defeat, perhaps believing that the military balance in the Far East would later permit the United States and China to drive a better bargain with Stalin, particularly if Russian entry was delayed or prevented. On August 2, Truman and his delegation left Potsdam with the fate of Korea as uncertain as it had been when the conference began two weeks earlier.<sup>50</sup>

47. "W. B.'s Notes," July 24, 1945, Byrnes Papers, Clemson University. Truman's message to Chiang is in *FRUS, 1945*, 7:950.

48. For Stimson's warning, see Stimson Diary, July 16, 17, 18, 1945. Stimson also worried that, if the British and French insisted on keeping Hong Kong and Indochina, Stalin would insist on solitary control of Korea. He may have mentioned this to Truman. See Stimson Diary, July 23, 1945. Molotov's request is recorded in *FRUS, Potsdam*, 2:253.

49. According to Leahy, Truman and Byrnes recognized that the Russians could take what they wanted in China: "They feel that an agreement between the Soviets and China can only be reached through radical concessions by China and Stalin will enter the war whether or not such concessions are made, and will thereafter satisfy Soviet demands regardless of what the Chinese attitude may be." Leahy Diary, July 17, 1945. General Marshall also thought the Soviets could get what they wanted by military force, and Stimson may have communicated this opinion to Truman (Stimson Diary, July 23, 1945).

50. John Carter Vincent wrote a memo on July 23 that argued against the view that the United States would obtain better terms in Manchuria by postponing discussions until a later date. It seems likely that he was attempting to challenge what he understood to be the rationale behind the decision not to discuss Far Eastern issues any further (*FRUS, Potsdam*, 2:1242-44). The subject of Korea did come up in the discussions briefly. On July 24, Soviet General Antonov asked the Americans



## III

In deciding to forego at Potsdam any detailed discussions of the political future of China and Korea, Truman and Byrnes were abandoning the approach that the State Department had hoped would contain Russian power in Asia. American leaders had long assumed that the political balance in Asia would be decisively influenced by the disposition of the competing forces at war's end; yet they had hoped that, through prior diplomatic agreement with the Soviet Union, American political influence might be preserved in areas—such as Korea and Manchuria—that Russian armies would likely liberate. There was no guarantee that the Soviets would abide by such agreements, but having no prior agreements seemed riskier still. Soviet armies were poised on the Manchurian border, awaiting their orders to drive into Manchuria, Korea, and North China. The experience of Eastern Europe had already convinced American officials that Soviet political influence followed Russian arms; and in Asia, where the Chinese Communists and other revolutionary forces were expected to be prime competitors for power, they feared that, without some form of American counteraction, a Soviet sphere of influence would develop. Since American strategists had rejected heavy U.S. military involvement on the Asian mainland, the option of using American forces as a counterbalance to Russian influence was severely limited. Nor could the United States expect Chiang K'ai-shek to serve as proxy. China's military strength was totally drained, its economy near collapse, its government under attack from all sides. Although committed to Chiang's government, Washington had no illusions that he could impose his rule over all of China, let alone resist Russian pressures.<sup>51</sup>

What was true for the entire region applied particularly within

if it would be possible for U.S. forces to operate amphibiously against the Korean coast in coordination with the planned Soviet offensive against the Japanese. Marshall replied that such operations could not be contemplated (*ibid.*, p. 351). This was in keeping with the previous American strategic decision to direct U.S. power against the Japanese home islands; operations in Korea were judged to be more difficult and less decisive than an invasion of Kyūshū. See Marshall's presentation at the June 18, 1945 White House review of military plans; *ibid.*, 1:904-5; and McFarland to Leahy, June 2, 1945, Record Group (hereafter RG) 218, Records of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Geographic Series, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45) sect. 1, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter, JCS Records).

51. See "Estimate of Conditions in Asia. . .," June 22, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 6:556-80. See also the Office of Strategic Services estimate, "Problems and Objectives of United States Policy," April 1945, Donovan Chronological File: April-May 1945, Truman Papers, Truman Library; and John Paton Davies, Jr., memo, July 10, 1945, "Estimate of Soviet Policy in East Asia," *FRUS*, 1945, 7:928-

Korea. The State Department estimated that twenty to thirty thousand Koreans served in the Red Army. These troops, presumably recruited from among the large community of Soviet Koreans in Siberia or incorporated from guerrilla units driven out of Manchuria by the Japanese, were expected to be prominent among the forces invading Korea. The State Department also believed it likely that Korea would be swept by revolutionary ferment. Communists within Korea had for twenty-five years bravely resisted Japanese rule, and during the thirties, they had been leading opponents of the Japanese, organizing struggles among workers, peasants, and students. With Japanese rule removed, these experienced revolutionaries could be expected to be active once again in Korean politics.<sup>52</sup>

Under these circumstances, Byrnes's and Truman's abandonment of diplomacy seemed to entail great risks. But they thought otherwise. Stalin's interpretation of the Far Eastern provisions of the Yalta accords had confirmed their fears of Soviet intentions and had dimmed their hope that Russia would follow American leadership in Asia. Diplomacy no longer appeared to offer any benefits. Instead, Truman and Byrnes, their confidence bolstered by the atomic bomb, chose to assert openly and unilaterally the American definition of postwar Asia and to back that definition as fully as possible with the military power available to the United States. No longer having anything to lose by firmness and doubting the value of a conciliatory approach, Truman and Byrnes set off on a bold, new course.

They first demonstrated this new boldness in the Sino-Soviet negotiations in Moscow. On August 5 Byrnes and Truman for the first time authorized Harriman to inject into the discussions the American interpretation of the Yalta accords. Harriman was instructed to tell Stalin that, in the American view, Soong had already met the terms of the Yalta agreements, the inclusion of Dairen in the Soviet military zone was unacceptable, and that the United States wished the Soviets to agree formally to respect the Open Door policy in Manchuria. On August 8, after the Soviet Union entered the war, Harriman met with Stalin. The Russian leader assured Harriman that American interests in Manchurian trade would be recognized, but he insisted that the Soviet proposal for Dairen was consistent with the Yalta agreements and necessary to guard Soviet interests. Harriman was not convinced: "It is difficult for me to believe," he cabled Washington, "in spite

52. *FRUS*, 1945, 6:561-63. For Communist activities in Korea, see Dae Sook Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement, 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 53-141, 189-203; and Se Hee Yoo, "The Communist Movement and the Peasants: The Case of Korea," *Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia*, ed. John Wilson Lewis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 61-76.



of Stalin's assurances, that there can be a truly free port under Soviet management with security control by Soviet secret police and I see in the Yalta Agreement nothing which would obligate us to support an arrangement of the kind described."<sup>53</sup> He was further agitated by a new Soviet demand that they receive some share of the Japanese enterprises in Manchuria as "war trophies." This threatened American hopes that Manchuria, the most industrially developed region of China, would become the base from which to rebuild the crippled Chinese economy. Byrnes told Harriman to oppose strongly any removals by the Soviets.<sup>54</sup>

However, Harriman apparently believed that the Soviets would not be moved by more diplomatic entreaties. With Soviet forces pushing ahead in Manchuria, Soong was on the verge of making further concessions that might compromise American interests. Firmer steps were required. If the United States was to protect its interests in Asia, it would have to do so unilaterally. On August 10, Harriman cabled his recommendation to Truman and Byrnes:

While at Potsdam General Marshall and Admiral King told me of the proposed landings in Korea and Dairen if the Japanese gave in prior to Soviet troops occupying these areas.

Considering the way Stalin is behaving in increasing his demands on Soong I recommend that these landings be made to accept surrender of the Japanese troops at least on the Kwantung Peninsula and in Korea. I cannot see that we are under any obligation to the Soviets to respect any zone of Soviet military operation.<sup>55</sup>

Harriman's cable arrived in Washington on the same day as the Japanese offer to surrender. Japan had accepted the terms of the Potsdam declaration "with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of

53. Byrnes to Harriman, Aug. 5, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 7:955-56; George Kennan memo, Aug. 8, 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 960-65; the quotation is from Harriman to Truman and Byrnes, Aug. 8, 1945, *ibid.*, p. 965. Truman later recalled that he was not hopeful about the results of the Sino-Soviet negotiations; Truman, *Year of Decision*, p. 424.

54. For Stalin's new demand and the American reaction, see Harriman to Byrnes and Truman, Aug. 8, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 7:958-59; and Byrnes to Harriman, Aug. 9, 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 965-66. For the importance American leaders attached to the industries in Manchuria, see Truman to Chiang K'ai-shek, Oct. 3, 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 1354-55; and the minutes of meetings between Edwin A. Locke, Truman's personal representative and economic adviser to the Chinese government, and the Chinese economic adviser to the Chinese government, and Chinese economic experts, Sept. 1945, Edwin A. Locke Files, Truman Library.

55. Harriman to Byrnes and Truman, *FRUS, 1945*, 7:967. Truman received a similar recommendation from Edwin Pauley; see Truman, *Year of Decision*, p. 433.

His Majesty as the Sovereign Ruler." Meeting at the White House early on the tenth, Truman, Byrnes, Forrestal, and Leahy discussed the American response. All were anxious to have the war ended quickly, and Leahy and Stimson advised Truman to guarantee the emperor. But Byrnes balked at making such a guarantee, both because he did not wish to alter the formula of unconditional surrender and because he feared domestic political repercussions if the administration granted the Japanese condition. After some discussion, Truman decided to send a note accepting the Japanese offer but providing no guarantee of the emperor. Instead, the United States specified that the emperor would be subject to the Allied supreme commander, an oblique answer intended to convey American willingness to retain the imperial institution if the Japanese so chose.<sup>56</sup>

By refusing to guarantee the emperor, Truman and Byrnes risked prolonging the war, a possibility that would allow the Russian armies more time to drive through Manchuria and, Stimson feared, to legitimize a Soviet claim to share in the occupation of Japan. However, Truman was not sure that a Japanese surrender would stop the Russian invasion. Harriman's reports of Russian intransigence in the negotiations with Soong seem to have convinced him that Stalin's appetite in Northeast Asia would not be quickly satiated. He suspected, he told his advisers, that the Soviets might not acknowledge the surrender, in which event the United States would act unilaterally and go on with the occupation of Japan.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, agreeing with Harriman that the protection of American interests required the swift insertion of a U.S. presence in Manchuria, Korea, and North China, Truman moved quickly to replace, as far as possible, Japanese power with American. On August 11, before he had received the recommendations of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) or the JCS on surrender arrangements, Truman ordered the military to arrange "to occupy the port of Dairen and a port in Korea immediately following the surrender of Japan if those ports have not at that time been taken over by Soviet forces."<sup>58</sup> With the negotiations in Moscow still stalled over the issue

56. There are accounts of this meeting in Truman, *Year of Decision*, pp. 427-29; Stimson Diary, Aug. 10, 1945; Leahy Diary, Aug. 10, 1945; Diary of James V. Forrestal, Aug. 10, 1945, Forrestal Papers, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. For a thorough analysis, see Barton J. Bernstein, "The Perils and Politics of Surrender: Ending the War with Japan," *Pacific Historical Review*, February 1977.

57. Truman, *Year of Decision*, pp. 431-32; Stimson Diary, Aug. 10, 1945; Forrestal Diary, Aug. 10, 1945.

58. Message, WARR 48004, Aug. 11, 1945, reproduced in JWPC 264/10, "Examination of the Practicability of Concurrent Occupation of Tokyo, Dairen,



of Dairen, and Stalin threatening to allow the Chinese Communists into Manchuria, the president decided, as he phrased it in his *Memoirs*, "to counter Russian intransigence with action."<sup>59</sup>

Thus the United States joined the scramble for territory and political advantage in Asia. With Japan's defeat sealed, and in the absence of any diplomatic agreements that allocated political influence, the political outcome of the war in the vast areas of Asia still occupied by Japanese forces remained in doubt. There was little question that, in the short run at least, the outcome would be profoundly influenced by which army accepted the Japanese surrender in a given area. Hence, even though the end of the war was in sight, the battle raged on. In Manchuria and Korea, the Russian armies plunged ahead; in China, Chu Teh, commander of the Communist armies, announced to his forces that they should demand the surrender of Japanese troops wherever they encountered them. And in Washington, at the same time, the SWNCC was meeting in a marathon session to draft the surrender instrument and General Order No. 1, the document that assigned to each Ally its zone of immediate military occupation.

General Order No. 1, drafted by SWNCC on August 10-12, approved by Truman on August 14, and issued by MacArthur on August 15, was the American effort to define, within the restraints imposed by limited military resources, the political shape of Asia. Incorporating as far as possible Truman's desire to deny to the Soviets and Chinese Communists important territorial objectives, the surrender plan allocated to the United States and Chiang K'ai-shek's regime responsibilities far in excess of their immediate military capabilities. It specified that Japanese commanders in China surrender only to Chiang K'ai-shek's government, in effect prolonging the war in the areas of North and East China where the Communists were the only anti-Japanese resistance. It gave to the Russians the responsibility of occupying

and Keijo, and Early Occupation of a North China Port," JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 386.2, Japan (4-9-45), sect. 4. The JCS had first discussed plans for the rapid occupation of ports in Asia at a meeting on July 26. It was these plans to which Harriman referred in his cable and that Truman ordered implemented. See JCS minutes, "Examination of the Practicability. . .," July 26, 1945, in *ibid.* Earlier plans prepared in the Pentagon had assigned the responsibility for occupying Manchuria, including Dairen, to the Soviets; see JWPC 375/2 "Occupation of Japan and Japanese-held Territories after Collapse or Defeat of Japan" (U.S. Military Policies), June 28, 1945, RG 319, Records of the Army Staff, ABC, decimal file 014, Japan (4-13-44), National Archives; and JWPC 264/6 "A Plan for the U.S. Occupation of Strategic Positions in the Far East in the Event of a Japanese Collapse or Surrender Prior to 'Olympic' or 'Coronet,'" July 19, 1945, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 386.2, Japan (4-9-45), sect. 3.

59. Truman, *Year of Decision*, p. 432.

Manchuria, though the American military was still under orders to take Dairen if its troops could reach the city before the Soviets. To the United States was reserved the sole duty of accepting the surrender of Japan proper. And, in what would soon prove to be a momentous decision, it divided Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel, with Russian forces to accept the surrender north of the line, American forces south of it.<sup>60</sup>

The thirty-eighth parallel was chosen out of a desire to permit American forces to occupy as much of Korea as possible, given the relative positions of Soviet and American armies. Secretary of State Byrnes had asked SWNCC to draw the surrender line as far north as practical, but the shortage of available troops and the long distance between Korea and the nearest U.S. forces made that task difficult. "The military view was that if our proposals for receiving the surrender greatly over-reached our probable military capabilities, there would be little likelihood of Soviet acceptance—and speed was the essence of the problem," recalled Dean Rusk, then an officer on the War Department general staff who participated in the long SWNCC deliberations on August 10-11. Nevertheless, Rusk and a fellow staff officer, Col. C. H. Bonesteel III, recommended, and the SWNCC accepted, the thirty-eighth parallel as the dividing line even though they believed it was further north than American troops could reach should the Soviets choose to disagree. "We did so because we felt it important to include the capital of Korea in the area of responsibility of American troops," Rusk remembered.<sup>61</sup> On August 14, the JCS approved this division of Korea and passed General Order No. 1 on to the president with the explanation that "the parallel 38° north has been selected in Korea since this gives to U.S. forces the port and communications area of Keijo [Seoul] and a sufficient portion of Korea so that parts of it might be apportioned to the Chinese and British in case some sort of quadripartite administration eventuates."<sup>62</sup>

60. General Order No. 1 is printed in *FRUS, 1945*, 6:658-59. Chu Teh's order is reprinted in *FRUS, 1945*, 7:514-15. For reports from China with recommendations that the United States help block the Chinese Communists, see Hurley to Byrnes, Aug. 12, 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 515-16; and Wedemeyer to Department of War, Aug. 12, 1945, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 386.2, Japan, sect. 4.

61. Dean Rusk memo, July 12, 1950, *FRUS, 1945*, 6:1039; Benjamin Block to Col. J. A. Frank, Apr. 30, 1947, U.S. Department of State, Department of State Records, decimal file 740.0019, Control (Korea)/1-3047 for a similar account. Block says that Secretary of the Navy Forrestal wrote Byrnes on August 11 suggesting that the thirty-eighth parallel be selected as the line dividing Russian and American zones in Asia. This was to permit an American occupation of Dairen. I have been unable to locate this letter.

62. Gen. A. J. McFarland to SWNCC, Aug. 11, 1945, *FRUS, 1945*, 6:657-58.



In making these moves, American leaders did not even offer a show of consulting with the Soviets: "The preceding months had shown us that Stalin and his colleagues did not view matters in the same light we did," Truman wrote later in his *Memoirs*, and this difference of opinion made discussions of surrender terms unnecessary. General Order No. 1 was sent to the Soviets on August 15, at the same time as it went out to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, giving the Russians the opportunity to suggest revisions only after the fact. Only the JCS made any effort to have the Soviets apprised of American intentions prior to the moving of American troops onto the Asian mainland. They suggested that the president send a message to Stalin, explaining that the American landings in Dairen, Seoul, and other Asian coastal cities were only for the purpose of ending the fighting and preventing sabotage of port facilities and would not affect the final peace settlement.<sup>63</sup> Such a message, however, was never dispatched. Although Truman made clear in his orders that he wished no military confrontation with the Russians, he did not shrink from a political showdown in Asia, a test that would determine if the Soviet Union was willing to accommodate itself to the American conception for postwar Asia when those goals were firmly and bluntly stated.

In the short run, Truman's bold policy paid off. On August 14, Stalin, backing away from his most extreme demands about the control of the port at Dairen, signed a treaty with the Chinese. The Soviet leader also approved the greater part of General Order No. 1—although a sharp exchange ensued between Stalin and Truman over the American refusal to grant the Russians a zone of occupation on Hokkaido. Thus the United States had attained the greater part of its objectives in Northeast Asia: Soviet support for Chiang K'ai-shek's regime, Chinese sovereignty over Manchuria, sole American control in Japan, and an American foothold in Korea. The actions also proved to American leaders the value of firmness in dealing with Moscow.<sup>64</sup>

63. Truman, *Year of Decision*, p. 435. The suggestion from the JCS is the enclosure of McFarland to SWNCC, *FRUS*, 1945, 7:660.

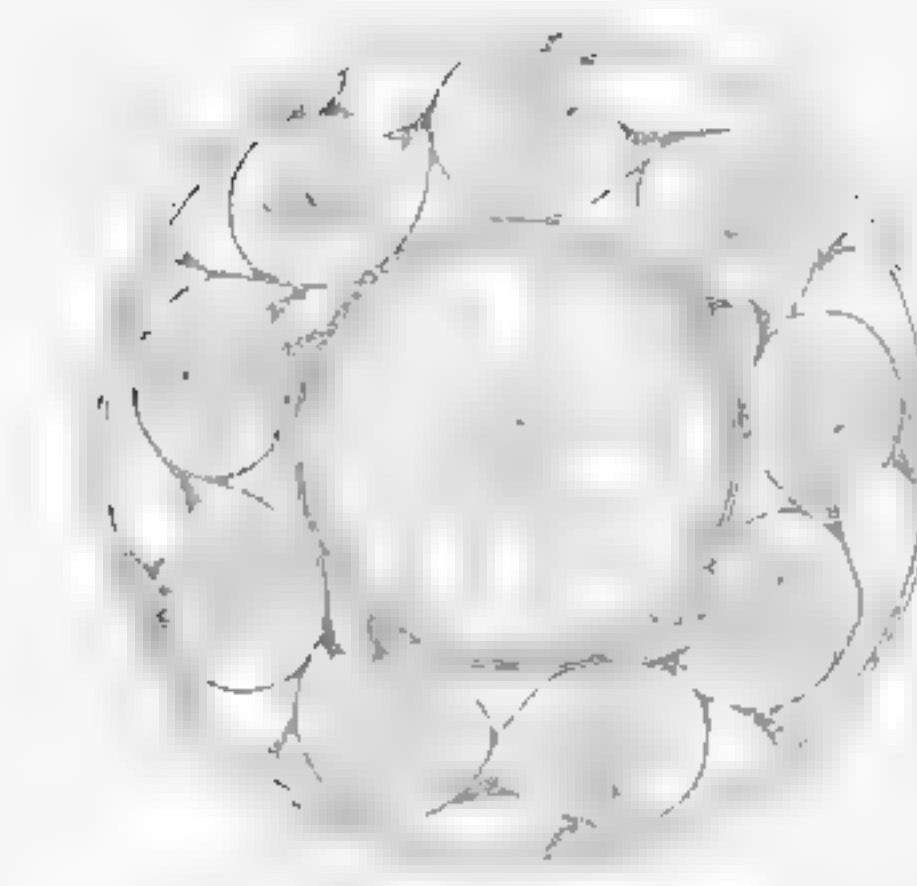
64. For the culmination of the Sino-Soviet negotiations, see Harriman to Byrnes, (2) Aug. 14, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 7:971-74; the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between the Republic of China and the U.S.S.R. is printed, with its subsidiary agreements, in U.S. Department of State, *United States Relations with China: With Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1949), pp. 585-96. For the exchange between Stalin and Truman, see *FRUS*, 1945, 6:667-68, 670, 687-88, 692, 698-99. Harriman saw the benefits of firmness in Harriman to Byrnes, Aug. 23, 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 689-90. The effort to occupy Dairen ceased when it became clear that Russian forces would arrive in the city ahead of the Americans: JCS to Wedemeyer, Aug. 18, 1945, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 386.2, Japan, sect. 4. Although Stalin had apparently approved the thirty-eighth

But if Truman's policy paid dividends to the United States, it was tragic for Korea. By Truman's decision to postpone a Korean settlement, the rushed attempt to occupy Seoul, and the division of the country at the thirty-eighth parallel, Korea was thrust directly into the developing cold war. Almost inevitably, Korea would have been a scene of rivalry between the United States and Russia after the Second World War. But it is easy to imagine that Korea might have been spared at least part of the horror and bloodshed it was to suffer if its future had been fully discussed before Japan surrendered. The atomic bomb and American hubris prevented this. Korea thus emerged from the war free at last of Japanese rule, but subordinate to two new masters who brought with them no design for the relief of a liberated people nor any plan for the reunification of the peninsula.

---

parallel as the dividing line in Korea, American officials feared the Russians would not stop there. Hence, the rapid occupation of Seoul remained the second charge—after the seizure of Tokyo—on American resources in the Pacific. See JCS to Wedemeyer, MacArthur, and Nimitz, Aug. 24, 1945, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45), sect. 1.





## U.S. Decisions on Korean Policy, 1943–1950: Some Hypotheses

STEPHEN PELZ

HARRY S. TRUMAN'S COSTLY DECISION TO ENTER THE KOREAN CIVIL WAR IN 1950 has drawn much scholarly attention and produced a variety of contending interpretations. Historians have explained Truman's decision as inspired by Wilsonian idealism, by realism in the face of Communist aggression,<sup>1</sup> by overreaction to a crisis, and by cynical oppor-

The author wishes to acknowledge the aid and comments provided by the following organizations and individuals: the Research Council of the University of Massachusetts/Amherst; the National Fellows Program, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California; the International Security Studies Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C.; the East Asian Institute, Columbia University; Michael Baron, Thomas Bernstein, Dorothy Borg, Ronald Caridi, Warren Cohen, Robert J. Donovan, Alexander George, Al Goldberg, Waldo Heinrichs, Michael Hunt, Chong-sik Lee, James W. Morley, Andrew Nathan, Tom Paterson, William Taubman, Nancy Tucker, Allen Whiting, Larry Weiss, and Marilyn Young.

1. James I. Matray, "An End to Indifference: America's Korean Policy during World War II," *Diplomatic History* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1978):181-96; *ibid.*, "Truman's Plan for Victory: National Self-Determination and the Thirty-Eighth Parallel Decision in Korea," *Journal of American History* 66, no. 2 (September 1979): 111-33. John Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (Cambridge, Mass.: W. W. Norton, 1959), *passim*.



tunism when presented with a chance to convince the American people and Congress to rearm the United States and Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> The following study differs from other historical accounts by concentrating on the process of American decision making and by generating explanations of some of the key decisions, using theories of decision making and organization.

To explain the origins of this war, we must make some basic assumptions about how wars begin. While its deeper causes lie in social, ideological, and economic conflicts, the proximate causes of war lie in the mismanagement of conflicts at the governmental level. In the case of Korea, American leaders were free to decide whether or not Korea was worth the risk of a war and, if they decided affirmatively, to deter the North Koreans, Chinese, and Russians. To deter an adversary, the decision makers must threaten to inflict greater losses on an opponent than that opponent can hope to gain by attacking, and they must make that threat credible. The United States, however, never made a conclusive decision to hold Korea, nor did it make a credible military threat against its adversaries there.<sup>3</sup>

Decision-making theory can help to explain this failure to apply deterrence. A decision-making analyst asks questions that narrow the problem to manageable size: Who were the key decision makers and how did they picture the world? When did they make decisions that closed out their options by committing them to certain kinds of action or by dooming them to inaction? When they made these key decisions, what did they perceive as the limits that their domestic and interna-

2. I've reconstructed Glenn Paige's interpretation from a series of his publications in which his attitude toward the quality of Truman's decision shifts drastically: *The Korean Decision (June 24-30, 1950)* (New York: Free Press, 1968); "Comparative Case Analysis of Crisis Decisions: Korea and Cuba" in *International Crises: Insights from Behavioral Research*, ed. Charles F. Hermann (New York: Free Press, 1972), pp. 41-55; "On Values and Science: *The Korean Decision* Reconsidered," *American Political Science Review* 71, no. 4 (December 1977): 1603-9; the most recent historical analysis based on declassified documents supports the main points of Paige's account; see Barton J. Bernstein, "The Week We Went to War: American Intervention in the Korean Civil War," *Foreign Service Journal* 54, no. 1 (January 1977): 6-9, 33-35; and *ibid.*, 54, no. 2 (February 1977): 8-11, 33-34. Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 565-87.

3. For a clear definition of deterrence, see Y. Harkabi, cited in Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1977), p. 22, and Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 60; George and Smoke treat the case of Korea in 1950 as one in which deterrence was not tried; see *ibid.*, pp. 140-72.

tional environments placed on their choices? Did they gather information on the problem and apply rational cost-benefit analysis, or did they make important decisions routinely and rapidly, without asking what costs their policy might entail?<sup>4</sup>

Organizational theorists can also help explain why policy making is muddled, for decisions often are made in unintegrated series, as the pressure of events and the functioning of the governmental machine push problems to the decision makers at the top. Setting goals, selecting diplomatic means, framing military and aid budgets, deciding on which strategic plans to adopt and which weapons to produce all take place at different times and with somewhat different personnel involved. When there is an inadequate integrating mechanism at the top, such a process often fails to produce a coordinated policy of deterrence for a country with world-wide commitments.<sup>5</sup> In such a system, strong-minded bureaucratic leaders may pursue the interests of their organization or their personal inclinations fairly freely, even though such actions may overexpand diplomatic commitments while undermining deterrent postures.<sup>6</sup>

The central decision makers in a great power often face a number of important decisions each week, and they usually survey each problem rapidly, work out a policy incrementally different from the unsatisfactory one, and hope that their new policy will preserve a minimum of each of the values that are threatened by the failure of the old policy. Herbert Simon labels this practice "satisficing," since it comprises piecemeal decisions by extremely busy men who prefer to accept the first generally satisfactory solution they can find, rather than make a long search for an ideal policy.<sup>7</sup> A satisficing decision maker neither investigates his values carefully, nor calculates the likely costs and benefits of a range of policies, and consequently he often finds that

4. The fullest description of the decision-making method is Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, eds., *Foreign Policy Decision-Making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1962).

5. On the selection of goals and strategies in large organizations, see Richard M. Cyert and James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 16-19, 26-38, 114-27; on disjointed serial decision making, see David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom, *A Strategy of Decision: Policy Evaluation as a Social Process* (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 99-102.

6. Two highly influential treatments of bureaucratic politics are Morton H. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1974), and Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

7. Herbert Simon, *Models of Man: Social and Rational* (New York: Wiley, 1957), pp. 203-6, 246-53.



he has postponed trading one goal for another, and that his policy costs too much for the benefits it promises. Satisficing decision makers get into trouble by hoping for too much success at too little cost.

As satisficed decisions accumulate, diplomatic commitments grow. At the outset decision makers may assume that they can reverse their course if they run into trouble, but as their policy becomes public they find themselves psychologically, politically, and diplomatically committed to a particular line of action. The first decisions on a problem are often the most critical in establishing diplomatic goals, but the decision makers must make them when the potential sources of trouble are part of the future and therefore the eventual costs of the policy are difficult to calculate. Consequently the decision makers gradually increase their investment by marginal modification of their policy, hoping to redeem their original commitment.<sup>8</sup>

A series of uncoordinated incremental decisions may combine with unexpected shifts in the international environment to produce a crisis, during which the pattern of satisficing decision making disappears. Crisis decision making is a parody of rational process, in which a small group of central decision makers face an overwhelming amount of obscure information, oversimplify the problem, make false analogies with the past, rapidly agree on a single option, and expel dissenters from their ranks.<sup>9</sup> But such crises rarely spring out of thin air; they arrive at the end of a series of decisions, for which the leaders are responsible and which give the adversary's action supercharged meaning.

At different points on the road to war, then, different types of decisions will occur—rational maximizing, satisficing, uncoordinated incremental, and bureaucratic—and each of the key decisions closes out some of the decision makers' options, until they believe they have no choice but to fight when challenged, even if no vital national interest is at stake. Between 1943 and 1950 American leaders made no single, well-calculated decision about the value of Korea to American security, but rather they made a series of satisficed, incremental, disjointed, and crisis decisions that effectively committed them to defend South Korea, while undermining their ability to deter a North Korean attack.<sup>10</sup>

8. For an analogy to a car accident in which the process of simultaneous serial decision by two parties leads to a collision, see Bruce M. Russett, "Cause, Surprise and No Escape," *Journal of Politics* 24 (February 1962): 3-22.

9. The literature on misperception during crises is extensive. See, for example, Charles F. Hermann, *Crisis in Foreign Policy: A Simulation Analysis* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1969) and Ole R. Holsti, *Crisis, Escalation, War* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1972).

10. Historical accounts that stress the inadvertent and slipshod nature of Ameri-

At the key decision points on the road to war, the behavior of their adversaries certainly shaped the options available, and in some cases, such as the June 1950 attack, narrowed the choices drastically, but domestic factors also played a key role in producing the conflict in Korea.

Roosevelt did not organize his White House staff and the State Department to frame and implement an integrated foreign policy, for he preferred to conduct foreign relations in what one observer has called a "highly personal and shambolic manner."<sup>11</sup> Roosevelt was his own geopolitician who secretly set goals and moved toward them on an often obscure and zig-zag course. Between 1941 and 1945 Roosevelt paid little attention to the future of Korea, for he concentrated on directing military campaigns, marshaling public support for the war, and maintaining the uneasy coalition against the Axis. Given his wartime preoccupations and his decision-making style, he paid little attention to the departmental committees that were supposedly preparing peace terms, and he left the State Department out of many of the major negotiations that shaped the peace.<sup>12</sup>

Roosevelt's Korean policy began aboard the U.S.S. *Augusta* in Placentia Bay off Newfoundland in August 1941, when Roosevelt met Churchill and drafted a statement of principles. Churchill and Roosevelt promised self government for all peoples, including those nations "forcibly deprived" of their sovereign rights. Six months later, after the United States had entered World War II, Roosevelt implied that this Anglo-American Atlantic charter applied to Korea, with its "experience of enslavement" by the Japanese.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of Roosevelt's idealistic statements was to convince the American people to aid England, enter the war, and take a continuing part in international relations; Korea was an afterthought, yet the president had promised to make at least some effort to achieve its independence. The president

can decisions are Soon Sung Cho, *Korea in World Politics 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967) and John Lewis Gaddis, "Korea in American Politics, Strategy, and Diplomacy, 1945-1950," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia*, ed. Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 277-98.

11. Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 715.

12. Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 532; Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay, 1941-1945: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 87, 475-96.

13. Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 281-84; Roosevelt reaffirmed these principles in the Declaration of the United Nations in 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 317-20; Matray, "End to Indifference," p. 182.



established a goal long before he had to consider the costs of carrying it out.

Roosevelt's underlying plan for the postwar world envisioned drawing Britain and Russia into a condominium to police the world through the United Nations, and in former colonial areas where the interests of the great powers overlapped he proposed to establish multipower trusteeships, which would prepare the colonial peoples for self government, while providing forums for continued great power cooperation. According to Robert Dallek, he was "less concerned with the details of these postwar arrangements than with their impact on attitudes at home and abroad."<sup>14</sup> Chiang K'ai-shek had been maneuvering to insure a friendly regime in postwar Korea by subsidizing the exiled Korean Provisional Government of Kim Ku, and Roosevelt believed that a Korean trusteeship involving China, Russia, the United States, and Great Britain would head off future Sino-Russian friction in the peninsula.<sup>15</sup> Trusteeship was a satisficing device. It would have to be worked out slowly, thereby postponing the explosive issue of postwar boundaries until after the war had been won; it promised independence, which encouraged anti-Japanese resistance in the occupied countries and approval from the American people; and it promised a stable postwar world by providing forums for the resolution of great power disputes in areas where spheres of influence overlapped.

Roosevelt discussed his proposals during his meetings with Stalin in 1943, but only briefly and casually. The president went to Cairo and Tehran mainly to keep the Chinese in the war against Japan and to secure eventual Russian entry into the Far Eastern war, and not to arrange a postwar settlement. Throughout 1943 Chiang K'ai-shek had been castigating the Americans for breaking their promises of increased aid, and the Chinese leaders warned repeatedly that they might leave the war. Since Roosevelt had little war material to give the Chinese, he decided to encourage Chiang by treating China formally as an equal and by offering to return Manchuria and Formosa (Taiwan) to the Chinese after the war.<sup>16</sup> Having raised the issue of the disposal of the Japanese Empire, he then had to deal with Korea as well. In the Cairo declaration he and Chiang promised that "in due course Korea shall become free and independent." Before the Cairo conference Roosevelt had only discussed the Far Eastern settlement briefly with his diplomatic advisers, and during the conference Harry Hopkins hastily drafted the declaration without further consultation with

14. Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 343.

15. Matray, "End to Indifference," pp. 183-86.

16. Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 382-99, 425-30.

Washington.<sup>17</sup> The Cairo declaration publicly committed the United States to make an effort to build a "free and independent" Korea in the postwar period.

Stalin was reluctant to discuss entering the East Asian war, since he wanted to avoid giving the Japanese an excuse to attack him before the war against Germany was over, and consequently he kept discussions of East Asia on an informal basis. In any case the future of Korea ranked near the bottom of his list of priorities. During his wartime conferences with Churchill and Roosevelt, Stalin persistently pressed for an early commitment of Anglo-American forces in Europe, a weakened postwar Germany, a buffer zone in Eastern Europe, and assurances against a separate peace by the western powers. At the Tehran meeting, Stalin privately endorsed Roosevelt's idea of a trusteeship for Korea.<sup>18</sup> 1944 was an election year and trusteeship served Roosevelt's political needs as well as his international plans, for he was wooing the independents and old progressives to whom Wendell Willkie had appealed in 1940. In 1943 Willkie published a best-seller titled *One World*, in which he called for "the orderly but scheduled abolition of the colonial system."<sup>19</sup>

Roosevelt set the fundamental direction of his Korean policy quite early, and his motives for choosing trusteeship were mixed, to say the least. He hoped (1) to encourage the Chinese and the Russians to fight the Japanese; (2) to inspire his fellow citizens to bear the burden of world leadership; (3) to win over Willkie's "one worlders"; (4) to establish a stable system in postwar Northeast Asia; (5) to acquire bases for the policing powers; and (6) to lead the Koreans toward good government and independence. Some of his goals conflicted, for Chiang and Stalin made unlikely trusteeship partners, and a long trusteeship contradicted the ideal of national independence.

Roosevelt committed himself to his Korean policy without investigating its chances for success. The Americans, Russians, Chinese, and English had not worked together easily against the Axis, and the chances of setting up a harmonious joint administration of Korea were slight indeed, especially in the absence of a common enemy. In any case, most Korean politicians favored independence, rather than

17. Herbert Feis, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 251-52; Roosevelt did not take a State Department representative to Cairo and planners for the Korean trusteeship were surprised by the announcement; see Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, pp. 70, 275-83.

18. Feis, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, pp. 246-79; Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 109.

19. Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, p. 8; Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign*



trusteeship, which made easy implementation of his program doubtful. Nor did Roosevelt try to win over the Korean exiles through the OSS, even though the State Department warned in 1944 that the Russians were training 35,000 Koreans for postwar duties. Roosevelt also paid little attention to plans for implementing his Korean trusteeship. Staff work occurred intermittently in the lower and middle levels of the State Department in February 1942, September 1943, and in the early spring of 1944, but by the spring of 1945 the planners had still not proposed the precise structure of the trusteeship authority, nor had they decided how long trusteeship should last.<sup>20</sup>

When Roosevelt met Stalin at Yalta in early 1945 to arrange for Russian entry into the Far Eastern war, he again treated the subject of Korea perfunctorily. The two decision makers discussed the Russian proposals for an East Asian settlement "in a few brief patches of private talk . . ." and Roosevelt endorsed Stalin's terms. Russia would continue to maintain a Soviet-controlled regime in Outer Mongolia, while acquiring major railroads and ports in Manchuria, as well as South Sakhalin and the Kuriles. In return Stalin promised to support a coalition government in China led by Chiang. The American and Russian military staffs also agreed that Russia would invade Manchuria, while the Americans would strike directly at Japan. They left North China and Korea in limbo, since they all expected the Japanese to conduct a fighting retreat in Manchuria and Kyūshū, and consequently there seemed no need to draw occupation boundaries for the American and Russian forces, which would be separated by hundreds of miles and several determined Japanese armies.<sup>21</sup>

In retrospect, Roosevelt's decision to stick with trusteeship for Korea at a time when he was retreating from a similar arrangement for Indochina seems unfortunate, for he might well have left Korea in the Soviet occupation sphere, thereby avoiding troubles such as he was having over the makeup of the Polish government. The costs of his satisficing at Yalta, however, were greater than he could have imagined, for he did not live to oversee the denouement of his Korean proposal.

After Roosevelt's death in April 1945 Truman inherited Roosevelt's

Korean policy, but the new president's personality and decision-making style doomed him to continue stumbling ever deeper into Korea. Truman's limited education and his lack of experience in foreign affairs made him fear that he was unqualified to be president (an opinion at least one major columnist shared), and he was therefore frequently timorous when facing important problems.<sup>22</sup> To compensate for his own weaknesses he indulged in bravado and tried to find good men to whom he could delegate responsibility. In turn he expected that his trusted lieutenants would bring him the facts on a problem and recommend a solution to it; if he thought the solution correct, he would let them proceed and support them against their critics, as long as they kept him informed and paid the proper deference to him and his office.

The new president tended to make diplomatic, military, and budget decisions separately, usually face to face with the official involved, and unlike Roosevelt, he reacted to events day to day, rather than pursue long-term goals. When he found that his uncoordinated satisficing painted him into a corner, he would lash out, blaming subordinates for his own troubles. Resignations and firings were frequent in the Truman years. He also was quite deferential to the anti-Soviet patricians who increasingly staffed the national security establishment, like Averell Harriman and Dean Acheson, for their anticommunism resonated with the president's own suspicions of the Russians.

Truman followed Roosevelt's example by trying to be his own chief of staff in foreign affairs, for he did not designate a single national security adviser in the small White House staff to coordinate diplomatic, military, and budgetary affairs. But the tasks of the modern presidency were too large for him to be able to play the role himself. Staff meetings, consultations on patronage and legislative strategy, and ceremonies consumed many mornings and part of most afternoons; meetings with the cabinet and national security council, speech revision, travel, speechmaking, and press conferences consumed many afternoons, and exercise and poker took up leisure hours. His only time for reflection was in the early morning, when he read the newspapers, and in the late evening, when he read memoranda.<sup>23</sup> On June 16, 1950, he wrote to his cousin:

22. Truman's insecurities and low self-esteem appear frequently in his personal papers; see Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 75-76, 114-15, 135, 158; for one syndicated columnist's contemporary opinion of Truman, see Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippman and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), pp. 133-39, 154-55.

23. For Truman's administrative practices, see the admiring, though revealing,

*Policy*, pp. 482-84.

20. Matray, "End to Indifference," pp. 182, 188, 191; for Kim Il-sung's experience in the Soviet Union, see Robert A. Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee, *Communism in Korea, Part I: The Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 223-30; for Soviet training of large numbers of Soviet-Koreans as a future liberating force, see Joungwon Alexander Kim, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 86-87; Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, pp. 30-31.

21. Feis, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, pp. 511-18.



This letter was started at 9:15 this morning and I've been adding to it in sections. I've had a cabinet meeting—an important one, seen a thousand people in groups, made four speeches and have had a dozen individual appointments with Congressmen & Cabinet members—and oh yes, I've vetoed a controversial bill, signed forty others, made a dozen criminals honest men by signing full pardons for them and now I only have to read a dozen or so documents and start about that many orders to various people on their way, get this letter off to you, one to Mary Jane and one to "Lizzie." How would you like to be President?<sup>24</sup>

Nor could his cabinet officers provide the coordination necessary. None of Truman's secretaries of state stayed long in the job before 1949, and Truman was reorganizing the Department of Defense between 1947 and 1949. Worse still, in 1948-49 Secretary of Defense Forrestal suffered a nervous breakdown, and his replacement, the abrasive Louis Johnson, was barely speaking to Secretary of State Dean Acheson by early 1950.<sup>25</sup> The National Security Council was supposed to meld proposed military and foreign policies into integrated national security advice, but the organization was new and its leaders no match for Johnson or Acheson. The council also lacked control of the national security budget process, and therefore had little leverage over plans and programs. Even more damaging to the NSC was presidential neglect, for Truman neither attended NSC meetings regularly nor paid much attention to its recommendations.<sup>26</sup>

Between the Yalta Conference in February 1945 and the Potsdam Conference in July, American attitudes on postwar territorial questions stiffened. Truman believed that much of the friction with Russia stemmed from conflicting interpretations of the Yalta agreements, and he was determined to carry out Roosevelt's policies and keep Stalin from twisting the agreements to Russia's advantage. As he put it, "I told 'em U.S. had ceased to give away its assets without returns." Until the last days of 1945 he continued to hope that his strong stand

treatments in Francis H. Heller, ed., *The Truman White House: The Administration of the Presidency 1945-1953* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 1980), passim; for a balanced view of Truman's administrative style, see Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1980), pp. 150-52; on Truman's susceptibility to anti-Communist advice, see Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 69-86.

24. Ferrell, *Off the Record*, p. 183.

25. Heller, *Truman White House*, p. 12.

26. Ibid., pp. 205-11; Mark M. Lowenthal, "The National Security Council: Organizational History," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, pp. 14-16.

on a series of diplomatic issues and the American monopoly of atomic bombs would succeed in securing Russian cooperation.<sup>27</sup>

Truman's all-or-nothing approach to relations with the Russians was too simple to be effective, for Stalin maintained a mixed policy toward the West between 1945 and 1947. In the long run the Russian dictator expected that economic crises would drive the western nations into internecine wars for world markets, but in the short run he feared that the Soviet Union was in danger, due to the damage it had suffered during the war. He was afraid that the western powers would incorporate western Germany and Japan into their spheres and once again attack the Soviet Union, and consequently as a minimum goal he sought buffer zones in key areas along the Soviet borders, though he would have been happy to control postwar Germany and part of Japan as well. The advance of the Anglo-American armies prevented him from taking Germany, and he settled for Eastern Europe, while refraining from ordering immediate revolts in France, Italy, China, and the Third World. In the short term, then, he sought an understanding on spheres of influence with Truman and a continuing entente with the West that would produce loans and reparations to rebuild the USSR.

Through negotiation, Stalin sought a weak Germany and Japan, and through direct intervention he established puppet regimes in Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania within his sphere of interest. Through intimidation he sought further buffers in northern Iran and at the Dardanelles, but in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, and France he encouraged local Communists to cooperate in coalition governments, and Korea was a candidate for neutralization as well. In Korea Stalin remained open to a coalition between the local Communists and the so-called bourgeois democrats well into 1946.<sup>28</sup>

Truman, however, wanted to carry out Roosevelt's trusteeship plan for Korea, which would require the powers to prepare the Koreans to select their own government through free elections. In May 1945 the president sent Harry Hopkins, one of Roosevelt's special envoys,

27. On Truman's hopes and fears about dealing with the Russians, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 198-200, 230-33, 243, and Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, pp. 69-86; the quotation is from Ferrell, *Off the Record*, p. 55.

28. For a recent account of Stalin's aims, see William Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Cold War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), pp. 38-41, 73-139, 151-54; see also Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967* (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp. 398-410.



to discuss Russo-American relations with Stalin, and the president assured Hopkins that he "could use diplomatic language or a baseball bat" to persuade the Russians to honor their commitments. At this time Truman and Hopkins were primarily concerned with convincing Stalin to admit non-Communist Poles into the Warsaw government, to support Chiang in China, and to solve an imbroglio over the new United Nations, and consequently Hopkins, who was dying from cancer, concentrated on these goals and ignored his instructions from the State Department to negotiate a detailed trusteeship arrangement for Korea. In a brief part of their conversations, Hopkins and Stalin simply reaffirmed that Korea would have a trusteeship.<sup>29</sup>

When Truman met Stalin at Potsdam in July, he remained determined to insist that the Russian ruler carry out the Yalta agreements as the Americans understood them. During the negotiations, James F. Byrnes, the new secretary of state, succeeded in securing Russian participation in the Far Eastern war, but he had to work hard for compromise solutions on questions of reparations, European peace treaties, and Poland's borders. In the end the summit talks did not break down, but the diplomats had to agree to postpone a number of other issues, such as the future of the Dardanelles and trusteeships in North Africa and Korea. The foreign ministers' conference, to which these issues were transferred, met in September and led to the feared deadlock on the peace treaties. Consequently nothing was settled.<sup>30</sup>

In mid-August Japan's sudden surrender caught the decision makers by surprise and forced them to face the issue of Korea. Truman arrived in the capitol from Potsdam on August 9 and found himself immersed in a "dizzy whirl" of activity caused by Japan's surrender. "... I had to issue orders so fast that several mistakes were made and then other orders had to be issued." As the Japanese collapsed, Russian forces moved into Korea, and State Department officials, who had been charged with planning for trusteeship, suggested sending American

29. Gaddis, *U.S. and Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 213-14, 220, 229, 232-36.

30. For the Potsdam and London conferences, see Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, pp. 109-32; James I. Matray argues that at Potsdam Truman decided to scrap trusteeship and use the newly tested atomic bomb to force a Japanese surrender before the Russians could move into Korea, but there is no direct evidence that such was the purpose of Truman or Byrnes though both were bolstered by the news of the bomb; the American decision makers pursued a Korean trusteeship, though without much fervor, in May, October, and December, 1945, and therefore it is likely that Korea simply got lost in the shuffle at the summit in July; for Matray's argument, see "Captive of the Cold War: The Decision to Divide Korea at the 38th Parallel," *Pacific Historical Review* 50, no. 2 (May 1981): 145-68.

troops to occupy that country as far north as possible to gain leverage for trusteeship negotiations. American military leaders opposed stretching the American occupation zone beyond Japan to the very limits of their logistic capacity, but the diplomats won the day in a hasty series of interdepartmental meetings. The Americans asked that their occupation zone reach to the thirty-eighth parallel, and the Russians agreed.

Of all the steps that led to the American involvement in Korea, the dispatch of American troops was the most important, for it signified that Truman was committed to carry out past pledges of support for an independent Korea. In part the decision was automatic, since Roosevelt's policy for Korea was trusteeship and Truman was determined to carry out Roosevelt's policy to the letter to demonstrate his reliability and toughness to Stalin, but in part it was also a crisis decision brought about by the Japanese collapse, and as a result Truman and his advisers failed to consider other plausible alternatives.<sup>31</sup> Each side might have agreed to send in token forces to take the Japanese surrender and then to leave the peninsula with the understanding that the Koreans would establish a neutral regime. Or Truman might have followed military advice and allowed the Russians to assume the occupation duties for the four trustees in Korea, while the United States occupied Japan and administered it for the Allies. Instead U.S. troops went to Korea.

In the calmer postwar days of 1945, the American decision makers might have realized that their occupation forces were overextended, particularly since demobilization was proceeding rapidly. For a variety of reasons, however, Truman continued from day to day in the fall of 1945 without reconsidering his foreign policy. Truman and Byrnes still hoped to tame the Russians by trading reconstruction loans and atomic information for concessions on Eastern Europe and Germany, and during the bargaining it was important to

31. Ferrell, *Off the Record*, p. 62; Bruce Cumings argues that Truman sent American troops to Korea in August to hold at least the southern part of the peninsula for an American sphere of influence, and he attributes this decision to the increased influence of anti-Soviet State Department bureaucrats and political advisers. See Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, pp. 111-31; there is little evidence that Truman or Byrnes considered Korea vital to the security of Northeast Asia or of the United States, and Truman probably was implementing established policy. American troops on the ground would help secure Stalin's cooperation in establishing a trusteeship and decisive American action in Korea would help to convince Stalin that the Americans have to be reckoned with in negotiations on Eastern Europe, Germany, and China.



maintain a firm diplomatic stance around the world.<sup>32</sup> The daily press of events also distracted and exhausted the new president, for the fall of 1945 was an extremely busy time. The abrupt end of the war forced Truman and his unprepared staff to make many detailed policy decisions on demobilization and on the easing of wartime economic controls, in addition to producing a domestic program to replace the New Deal. Between September 1945 and January 1946, Truman proposed a new economic stabilization program, held a National Labor-Management conference, introduced a program for the peacetime control and development of atomic energy, asked Congress for a national health insurance program, sought legislation to unify the defense departments, and held a summit conference with Prime Minister Attlee of Great Britain. Too rapid decontrol of prices led to increased inflation, while strikes broke out across the country, forcing White House mediation in the most serious cases.<sup>33</sup>

Truman was occasionally overwhelmed by the pressure, and he complained repeatedly that he had not asked to be president, jokingly adding that what he really should have been in life was a piano player in a whorehouse. Harold D. Smith, the director of the Bureau of the Budget and a man Roosevelt had brought in to improve the organization of the White House, at first hoped that Truman would improve the management of the operation, but he found the new president even less orderly than Roosevelt. Worse still, Smith thought, Truman was often unready to face issues because of inadequate staff work. Preparations for important diplomatic meetings, such as the one with Attlee, were "completely unorganized" and "irregular," another observer noted. "All the top men . . . are trying to do too much . . ." confessed Charlie Ross, Truman's press secretary. On October 13, 1945, Truman himself complained that "The pressure here is becoming so great I can hardly get my meals in."<sup>34</sup> Secretary of State Byrnes's style compounded the difficulty, for he operated alone, traveling the diplomatic circuit and considering high policy with a few aides, while allowing the White House and his subordinates in the bureaucracy to handle other matters, ranging from summitry to routine matters of implementation, such as Korean occupation policy.<sup>35</sup>

A clumsy arrangement for administering occupied Korea com-

32. Patricia Dawson Ward, *The Threat of Peace: James F. Byrnes and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945-1946* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979), pp. 18-22; Gaddis, *U.S. and Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 244-76.

33. Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 119-84.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 135-36, 145.

35. Ward, *The Threat of Peace*, pp. ix, 18-20.

pounded the difficulty of recognizing the growing problems on the peninsula. The State Department set occupation policy while the Department of the Army carried it out through a chain of command that stretched from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) in Washington through MacArthur's viceregal headquarters in Tokyo to Seoul. The State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee of upper level officials concerned themselves with Korea only occasionally. As a result the State Department continued to press a reluctant John R. Hodge, the commanding general of the American military government in Korea, to work for a four-power trusteeship and to resist the demands of the Koreans that they become independent forthwith.<sup>36</sup> MacArthur gave Hodge wide latitude and sympathized with Hodge's resentment of State Department meddling, and consequently Hodge felt free to undercut the goal of trusteeship. In part Hodge did so because his personal ideology made him deeply suspicious of cooperating with the Russians and the Korean Left.<sup>37</sup> More important was his belief he needed the South Korean Right to help run his occupation administration in the face of nationalist demands for immediate independence. And since his orders were broad and infrequent, he continued to operate under standard army procedure, which let field generals enjoy tactical flexibility while carrying out broad strategic mandates.

In August 1945 the War Department ordered Hodge to go to Korea, remove Japanese imperialism, maintain order, and prepare the Koreans for eventual self government, but it did not give him enough troops or military government personnel to run the occupation zone in the face of a resentful population. Consequently Hodge had to choose between working through the provincial governments, police, and courts staffed by Koreans left over from the Japanese colonial period, or through the Korean Peoples' Republic (KPR), a coalition of anti-Japanese Koreans who had established governmental committees and armed forces in most provinces throughout the peninsula. Hodge chose to work with the former Japanese collaborators, rather than the KPR leaders who wanted immediate independence and acted as if they comprised the legitimate government. Worse still, in Hodge's eyes, was the presence of Communists in some of the KPR's key positions. By December Hodge had established a South Korean government and an embryonic military constabulary to help him maintain order and suppress the KPR government committees in the provinces and cities of the south.<sup>38</sup> Hodge's decision saddled

36. Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, pp. 110-11.

37. Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, pp. 122-29, 135-51.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 151-213; Cumings stresses the Americans' ideological sympathies



him with a sizable group of collaborators whose future would be grim if the more nationalistic KPR won out.

While Hodge went his own way in Korea, Byrnes pursued an agreement with the Soviet Union, and at the Moscow foreign ministers' conference in December 1945 he was able to strike deals on a variety of issues, including Korea. The Americans and the Soviets agreed that a joint commission of their occupation officers in Korea would unify the country economically, establish a provisional government, and administer a trusteeship for five years. At this point there was still a chance for a neutralist solution in Korea, as there was in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, since elements were available in Korea for a diverse domestic coalition. In North Korea Cho Man-sik, a Christian moderate, had established his own party and was calling for independence, while in the South the independent Syngman Rhee and Kim Ku, the head of the wartime exile government in Chungking, were building substantial followings.<sup>39</sup> The KPR political committees in the capital and the provinces had attracted numerous Koreans of all political persuasions,<sup>40</sup> while divisions among the Communists permitted hope that the parties of the Left would not act as a bloc. The Communists split among Soviet Koreans (many of whom held dual membership in the Communist party of the Soviet Union and the KCP); the pro-Soviet Kapsan group of former guerrillas led by Kim Il-sung; the Yenan group of Koreans whose training had been in China, and the domestic Korean party members who were even less susceptible to discipline than the Kapsan and Yenan groups.<sup>41</sup>

If Truman had not concluded that Korea was a test case, and if Hodge had not already sided with the collaborationist Right in South Korea, there would have been a chance for the Americans and the Russians to create what Stalin would term a bourgeois-democratic government. The two great powers might then have rapidly turned over to this new regime the responsibility for elections, withdrawn their troops, and neutralized the country. Political tides were running against such a solution, however. When the news of the Moscow agreement reached Seoul, pro-independence strikes and demonstrations broke out, making Hodge's job difficult. Gen. Archer L. Lerch, Hodge's aide, sought to undercut Korean anger by publicly blaming the Soviets

with the Korean Right, but it is difficult to see how Hodge could have carried out his orders by cooperating with nationalistic leftists and centrists, who wanted immediate independence.

39. Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, pp. 83-86.

40. Cummings, *Origins of the Korean War*, pp. 68-91, 267-89.

41. Ilpyong J. Kim, *Communist Politics in North Korea* (New York: Praeger, 1975), pp. 6-7.

for the trusteeship, and the Russians revealed that the Americans were the party that had insisted on trusteeship all along. Hodge then compounded the imbroglio by threatening to resign, and Truman decided to let Hodge control the joint commission negotiations.<sup>42</sup>

By early 1946, when Hodge threatened to resign, Truman was moving toward a policy of containing Stalin, rather than cooperating with him. Charges were beginning to mount that Truman's State Department was soft on communism. In November 1945, Patrick J. Hurley, Truman's mediator in the Chinese civil war, accused the State Department of favoring Mao's forces over Chiang's nationalists in China, and Truman decided to back Chiang.<sup>43</sup> In December 1945 and in early 1946 Arthur H. Vandenberg and other leading Republicans compounded Truman's difficulties by accusing Byrnes of appeasement<sup>44</sup>—a charge that threatened to disrupt the Democrats' political coalition. Truman had offended labor leaders by opposing wage increases, and he was in danger of losing large chunks of the ethnic labor vote in such swing states as Vandenberg's Michigan if he appeared soft on issues such as atomic energy and Poland. In January 1946 the Republican congressional leadership opened the campaign year by denouncing "any betrayal of the small nations in the making of the peace." And on February 27, 1946, Senator Vandenberg proclaimed that Truman should draw a line beyond which he would not compromise.<sup>45</sup> In early January Truman decided to repudiate Byrnes's Moscow settlement, for he believed that he had to threaten Russia "with an iron fist and strong language" to prevent another war. And he concluded, "We should maintain complete control of Japan and the Pacific. We should rehabilitate China and create a strong central government there. We should do the same for Korea."<sup>46</sup>

Stalin grew tired of waiting for an American loan and for a conciliatory policy on Eastern Europe and the Far East. In the latter area he had accepted American domination of Japan, Chiang's control of China, and a trusteeship for Korea, only to be denounced by Lerch for forcing trusteeship on the Korean people, and he complained personally to Harriman about Lerch's behavior.<sup>47</sup> On February 9 he made a major speech declaring that war and capitalism were linked

42. Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, pp. 105-23; *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*) 1946, vol. 8, *The Far East* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 617-19.

43. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, pp. 149-52.

44. Ward, *The Threat of Peace*, pp. 79-80.

45. Gaddis, *U.S. and Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 290-96.

46. Ferrell, *Off the Record*, p. 80.

47. *FRUS*, 1946, 8:622.



inextricably and that the Soviet Union had to mobilize its economy. Truman reciprocated Stalin's suspicions. On February 22, George Kennan's long telegram calling for containment arrived on Truman's desk and through February telegrams came in describing the breakdown of the U.S.-USSR negotiations in Korea and difficulties in Iran. On February 25, Eben Ayers recorded in his diary that "The President pulled a number of telegrams . . . out of the holder on his desk . . . with a comment that we were going to war with Russia or words to that effect. He said that the situation looks bad and said there are two fronts, one Korea."<sup>48</sup> In the end Truman gave Hodge latitude to insist that only the Korean Right be consulted in establishing an interim government for all Korea, while Stalin insisted that the Right and center be excluded, and only the protrusteeship Left, which followed Moscow's line, be consulted.<sup>49</sup> The superpowers had helped to polarize the Korean political scene, and the Americans began preparing in earnest to establish a separate regime in the south. Truman's attempt to carry out Roosevelt's trusteeship policy in August led to a commitment to a South Korea led by the Right in December.

For a year after the spring 1946 deadlock in the joint commission the Americans continued to maintain their occupation troops in Korea, while working for a diplomatic solution that would favor anti-Communist Koreans, but they had no success. By the fall of 1947, however, a variety of factors led them to begin the fatal process of withdrawing from South Korea, while maintaining a primarily verbal commitment to a UN-sponsored South Korean government. Due to severe economic and political crises in Western Europe and the Middle East in 1947, Truman and Marshall decided to increase economic and military aid for the Atlantic and Mediterranean areas, just at the time when the Republican congress was insisting that Truman cut the budget.<sup>50</sup> Funds were not available to continue an expensive occupation, and, in any case, there were not enough troops left in South Korea to deal with strikes and demonstrations, if the proindependence forces decided on a nationwide campaign. Robert Patterson, the secretary of war, told Truman that the troops should be redeployed to Europe, while the State Department warned that withdrawal from Korea would lead to a Communist takeover and a severe blow to American prestige in Asia.<sup>51</sup>

48. Diary of Eben A. Ayers, Feb. 25, 1946, Eben A. Ayers Papers, Truman Library, Independence, Mo.

49. Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, pp. 227-52.

50. Gaddis, "Korea in American Politics," pp. 278-83.

51. Ibid.; William Whitney Stueck, Jr., *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 101.

The result of the clash between the two bureaucracies was a satisfied policy negotiated under the auspices of the new National Security Council. The decision makers agreed to turn the Korean problem over to the UN, a move that would allow the United States to withdraw its troops and minimize the bad effects if South Korea fell.<sup>52</sup> In May 1948 the UN held an election in the South, and a National Assembly convened the same month. The Americans hoped to protect the new republic with words and limited aid, but not deeds—a policy of bluff. In April 1948 the State and Defense Departments persuaded the president to ratify another bureaucratic compromise in NSC 8/2. The Americans would try to redeem their commitment to South Korea by providing enough military aid to enable the South to defend itself against domestic insurrection and border raids, thereby allowing eventual withdrawal of American occupation troops, but they would undertake no commitment to defend South Korea in the future, for there were not enough troops to go around.<sup>53</sup> In staff studies for the JCS, however, the planners admitted that a North Korean invasion could overwhelm the South's forces that would be set up under the aid program. In case of a full-fledged attack, Gen. Omar N. Bradley expected that the United States would appeal to the United Nations Security Council,<sup>54</sup> but Acheson told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that while the United States "would take every possible action in the U.N. [,] I do not believe that we would undertake to resist . . . by military force." He explained that "probably [U.N. action] would not be taken because they [the Russians] would veto it."<sup>55</sup>

Publicly Acheson declared that the South Koreans could rely on the UN (and therefore the United States) to aid them; privately the Americans agreed that they would not allow themselves to be drawn into a war to save the South Koreans. But in June 1950, they reversed this private resolve. There were a variety of reasons for this reversal—reasons others have explored in great detail. First, the history of U.S.-South Korean relations left the Americans with a commitment to uphold the UN-sponsored government in Seoul and if Truman had

52. Gaddis, "Korea in American Politics," pp. 282-83.

53. Stueck, *Road to Confrontation*, pp. 84-102.

54. *FRUS*, 1947, 7:944-78; "The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy," mimeographed, Modern Military Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C., vol. 3, James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, "The Korean War," part 1 (n.d.), pp. 25-26.

55. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings Held in Executive Session, *Reviews of the World Situation: 1949-1950*, 81st Cong., 1st and 2nd sess., p. 191.



deserted the UN and the elected government of South Korea while they were under fire he would have damaged the international credibility of the United States and invited further aggression. This rational calculus is insufficient to explain Truman's decision fully, however, for intervention in Korea forced Truman to assume grave military risks in Europe—risks that deeply concerned the western European states and far outweighed the potential damage in Korea. At the outset of the Korean hostilities the JCS estimated that the Russians had enough troops in East Asia to expel American forces from the peninsula and in July their intelligence staff estimated that even Chinese intervention would require such a large expeditionary force as to "jeopardize . . . our ability to implement the current emergency war plan to an unacceptable degree." On July 14, 1950, Acheson told the cabinet that the threat of Russian and Chinese intervention had provoked a feeling in Europe of "petrified fright."<sup>56</sup> Second, historians have stressed that the shock of the invasion of June 24-25 produced a crisis atmosphere and a sense of necessity, but the administration had stood by when Communist forces had driven from Manchuria into North China and from North China across the Yangtze, into larger and more valuable areas than Korea.

The external factors above are important, but insufficient by themselves to explain why the value of South Korea increased drastically for Truman and Acheson after the North Korean invasion. After all, the American leaders might have justified inaction by citing the JCS's repeated declarations that Korea was expendable and by blaming the South Korean defeat on the incompetence of Syngman Rhee as they had blamed the fall of China on Chiang. We must therefore explain why Truman misperceived the Korean situation at a time when his secretary of state still hoped to split some of the Chinese Communist leaders away from Stalin. Truman needed to see the North Korean invasion of South Korea as part of a global challenge directed from Moscow at American collective security systems, for he was vulnerable to serious charges from his domestic critics if he did not intervene.

Truman would have had grave difficulty if he had tried to justify letting South Korea fall by blaming the military weakness of the United States and its Korean protégé on Republican congressional

56. *FRUS*, 1950, 7:216-17, 346; Frank Pace to JCS, probably July 1, 1950, and Joint Strategic Plans Committee, Military Estimate of the Korean Situation, JSPC 853/5, July 1, 1950, Record Group (hereafter, RG) 218, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45), sec. 24, National Archives; Minutes of cabinet meeting, July 14, 1950, Dean Acheson Papers, box 65, Truman Library.

budget cutters, for he would have risked an expanded McCarthyite investigation into the military reasons for the loss of China and South Korea—an investigation that would have revealed that Truman himself had a very poor record in military planning between 1946 and 1949. Truman knew well the kind of headlines that would result from such hearings, for he had made his reputation by conducting hearings into military mismanagement during World War II, and he had helped to set off the emotional Pearl Harbor attack investigation by publishing an article advocating defense unification in 1944.<sup>57</sup> The Republicans would have found many points to make against Truman. After the end of the Second World War, Truman had allowed demobilization to progress so far that he had only 1.5 million men under arms in 1946-47, while the Russians retained 4 million, according to contemporary estimates. Truman believed that economic and political restrictions prevented him from spending the sums that the service heads said were required to defend the commitments that the United States had assumed around the world. To avoid inflation Truman sought a balanced budget, which led him to adopt a curious budgeting procedure. He subtracted anticipated domestic expenditures from anticipated revenues, and then gave the military what was left. As one analyst put it, "any relationship between America's foreign policy goals and its military strategy was purely coincidental."<sup>58</sup> Since the military planners lacked funds for the necessary conventional forces, they increasingly turned to atomic weapons as the only way to deter the Russians from attacking Europe.

Truman based his atomic strategy on the unfortunate assumption that the USSR would not have a strategically significant number of atomic weapons for ten to twenty years. Gen. Leslie R. Groves assured the president in 1945 that the Russians had no high-grade uranium of their own and that the Americans and British had gained control of 97 percent of world uranium production through a program of preemptive buying. The Russians, he predicted, would have to figure out how to use low-grade ore and could only produce a small number of bombs after a long period of development. James B. Conant, the

57. Martin V. Melosi, *The Shadow of Pearl Harbor: Political Controversy over the Surprise Attack, 1941-1946* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1977), pp. 71-82.

58. "History of JCS," vol. 2, Kenneth W. Condit, "1947-1949," pp. 18-19, 22; Terrell, *Off the Record*, pp. 160-61. For Truman's military budgeting, see Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 28-266; the quotation is from David S. McLellan, *Dean Acheson: The State Department Years* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1976), p. 163.



atomic scientist, and State Department experts warned Truman that the Russians might have the bomb in three to five years, but the president chose to believe Groves. In 1949, when the Russians exploded their first bomb, the press rightly portrayed Truman as surprised.<sup>59</sup>

Encouraged by illusions of atomic monopoly, Truman failed to push the atomic program sufficiently in 1946-47 to create a real deterrent, even though the Russians had refused to accept his proposals for nuclear disarmament. Problems in plutonium production delayed bomb construction, and until late 1948 the weapons builders were still constructing Mark III plutonium-implosion bombs—each of these laboratory weapons required a team of twenty-four men to work two days to arm. Truman had allowed the civilian assembly teams to disband in 1946 and the first military team was not trained and ready until December 1947. Worse still, there were few bombs available with which to deter or fight the Russians: one bomb was ready; twelve were unassembled; and the factories were producing only two bombs per month.<sup>60</sup> In April 1947, when David E. Lilienthal, the new chairman of the AEC, briefed Truman on the state of the nuclear program, Truman was shocked—"a grim, gray look on his face." By the fall of 1947 Truman was trying to gloss over atomic deficiencies; he told Eben Ayers, an assistant press secretary, that "he did not believe there were over a half-dozen A-bombs in the United States," although, he added, "that was enough to win a war." At exactly this time the war planners told the JCS that to carry out their strategy of "killing a nation" they would need approximately 400 Nagasaki type bombs to drop on 100 Soviet cities.<sup>61</sup> In early 1948 the Air Force had only 33 heavy bombers capable of delivering atomic bombs, and in mock raids on New York City and Dayton, Ohio in 1947 and 1948, attrition due to lack of repair and misses due to poor navigation were appalling. In the Dayton raid, which took place at night, not one bomber reached the target.<sup>62</sup>

Truman reconfirmed his own reliance on atomic strategy and his

59. Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War 1945-1950* (New York: Knopf, 1980), pp. 37-38, 98-112, 273, 312-14.

60. See David Alan Rosenberg's treatment of the whole evolution of the atomic strategy, "American Atomic Strategy and the Hydrogen Bomb Decision" *Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (June 1979): 65-67; the information on the lack of assembly teams is from an unpublished version of this paper; Herken, *Winning Weapon*, pp. 196-99.

61. David E. Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 2, *The Atomic Energy Years, 1945-1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 165; Ayers diary, Oct. 14, 1947, Truman Library.

62. Herken, *Winning Weapon*, pp. 241, 243-99.

slighting of conventional forces after the Republican Congress cut taxes in 1948—a presidential election year. In the fiscal year 1949 budget he did provide extra funds for small increases in personnel and aircraft strength, and he secured a revived selective service system, but he also publicly set a limit on the military budget of approximately fifteen billion dollars for FY-1950.<sup>63</sup> The JCS repeatedly warned the president between 1947 and 1950 that he was extending America's diplomatic commitments beyond the nation's existing military means. James V. Forrestal, secretary of defense, asked the State Department and the National Security Council in July 1948 to define the American foreign policy objectives, which should serve as a guide to military policy. The eventual result was NSC 20/4, a paper that predicted that the Soviet Union might be drawn into a major conflict with the United States by an accidental clash. Commenting on the NSC paper, the JCS warned that "current United States commitments . . . are very greatly in excess of our present ability to fulfill them either promptly or effectively." In 1948 the chiefs suggested a phased build-up to be completed in 1952 that would provide fourteen ready divisions and a seventy-group air force. The three service chiefs estimated that the FY-1950 budget for these forces, which "would be capable of meeting the initial requirements of a joint emergency war plan," would be thirty billion dollars, exactly twice what Truman was willing to spend, and they refused to allocate funds under the fifteen billion dollar ceiling. Truman needed to choose between raising taxes or trimming foreign commitments, but he chose not to make trade-offs.

In 1949 Truman continued to ignore the worries of the JCS. To reinforce his stand against increased military spending he appointed as secretary of defense Louis Johnson, a party fund-raiser and former assistant secretary of war, who promised to cut defense spending. Truman backed Johnson's efforts. In January 1949 the president told Congress that he was "convinced" the military budget should stay at approximately the same level "in the foreseeable future," and in mid-1949 he tried to cut the FY-1951 budget further.<sup>64</sup>

Truman also failed to force his military advisers to produce war plans that could support the weight of his foreign policy. Between 1945 and 1949 the JCS had grave difficulty agreeing on a unified war plan, since the tight budget required difficult choices and since each service wanted a major role in implementing the strategy. Finally

63. Robert J. Donovan, "The Devastating Time: Truman, the Hydrogen Bomb, China and Korea," *International Security Studies Program Working Papers*, no. 6 (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, Apr. 19, 1979), pp. 16-18.

64. Condit, "History of JCS," 2:225, 226, 231, 257, 271.



in December 1949, the JCS adopted the *short range* emergency plan known as OFFTACKLE.<sup>65</sup>

OFFTACKLE did not offer much hope to the South Koreans, or even to the Europeans in the event of war. In the plan, the JCS assumed that "the USSR and/or her satellites" would begin a global war by seizing all of continental Western Europe (with the possible exception of Spain) and large parts of Asia. Both sides would use atomic bombs, but the Russian atomic campaign would be limited because of low production and problems with delivery. After the initial Russian successes, the United States, Britain, and Canada would re-fight World War II by standing on the defensive in the Pacific while launching a strategic air offensive against the Soviet homeland and by reinvading Europe. Great Britain would provide a vital base for launching the atomic offensive, possibly supplemented by Okinawa and Egypt. When war broke out with the USSR or one of its satellites, first priority would go to securing the British Isles from invasion and helping the Spanish hold the Pyrenees, thereby securing the Mediterranean line of communication. After a steady atomic and conventional bombing campaign, American and British forces would invade Europe from England and North Africa, thereby cutting the Russian remnants off from their homeland by a huge pincer movement. The allies would then liberate the satellites and force the Soviets to disarm. To ensure the success of OFFTACKLE, the Americans would have to concentrate their limited conventional forces in the European theater, thereby sacrificing Korea and most of the rest of the world. Consequently, the only war plan in existence for Korea provided a program for evacuating American military advisers.

New defense liabilities made OFFTACKLE outdated even before it was formally adopted. The NATO pact implied that planners had to provide for the defense of a line in Western Europe, while the Russian acquisition of atomic weapons made a nuclear strike against Russia infinitely more dangerous. Air Force intelligence officers predicted that the Russians would be able to hit American targets with ten to fifty atomic bombs in 1950 and that the Russian attacks "could seriously impede our mobilization" and cause "more than one million casualties."

Failure to provide for an air defense for the continental United

65. For the reasoning behind the JCS's conclusion that United States strategy required abandoning Korea in case of war, see "MOONRISE" (J.W.P.C. 476/1), June 16, 1947, RG 218, CCS, decimal file 381, USSR (3-2-46), sect. 5; the over-all war plan in effect at the time of Korea was "OFFTACKLE" (JCS 18-4/46), approved on Dec. 8, 1949, and renamed "SHAKEDOWN" on July 19, 1950; for "OFFTACKLE" see *ibid.*, sect. 41.

States was particularly striking. There were only a handful of radars available and few planes to intercept Russian attacks if they were spotted. On November 16, 1949, Vandenberg warned the other chiefs that "almost any number of Soviet bombers could cross our borders and fly to most targets in the United States without a shot being fired at them."<sup>66</sup>

Even the ability of the Air Force to deliver an atomic attack sufficiently devastating to retard the Russian advance into Europe was in doubt, though the atomic stockpile had grown significantly by 1950. Because American bombers would have to travel over a lot of enemy territory, they would meet a fair amount of enemy resistance, and they would lose one-third to one-half of their planes in the process. After considerable investigation official estimators argued that the Russians would shoot down so many bombers that the attack would fail to be decisive and that even if the bombers got through, the Russians would not surrender, but continue their assault.<sup>67</sup>

The military planners' struggles over budgets, roles, and missions became public in 1949. During congressional hearings on the B-36 the admirals denounced the Air Force strategy of retaliation against Soviet cities and war industries and argued instead for carrier-based atomic attacks on the Soviet armies' lines of communication as the best way to defend Europe. But Louis Johnson suppressed the internal reports that questioned the effectiveness of the atomic strategy and Truman quashed the admirals' revolt.<sup>68</sup>

Because of Truman's budgetary restrictions, he had to rely on conventional ground and air forces to deter an attack in East Asia—forces that were clearly inadequate. In the spring of 1950, one investigator declared, "We have no tactical air force worthy of the name . . ." and Allied planners feared that they lacked enough fighters to protect the airfields in Great Britain—the bases from which the bombers delivering the main atomic stroke against Russia would leave.<sup>69</sup>

66. Rosenberg, "American Atomic Strategy," p. 31; Apr. 13, 1950, Vannevar Bush, director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development during World War II, had warned Bradley that America's military situation was appalling, and he questioned whether the United States had enough fighters to protect the United States or enough bombers to penetrate Soviet defenses to deliver the blow envisaged in "OFFTACKLE"; Bush's letter is in *FRUS, 1950*, 1:227-34; the Air Force admitted that some of Bush's fears were justified, though Air Force planners occasionally insisted that their strategic bombing force was adequate; see the memorandum from Trevor H. Landon to H. Vandenberg, June 13, 1950, RG 341, Records of the United States Air Force, OPD, decimal file 381, National Archives; on continental air defense, see Condit, "History of JCS," 2:536-40.

67. Condit, "History of JCS," 2:352-53; Herken, *Winning Weapon*, pp. 293-99.

68. Herken, *Winning Weapon*, pp. 295, 308-10.

69. Vannevar Bush to Bradley, Apr. 13, 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, 1:227-31.



The army had only ten trained divisions, each of which was under strength by a third.

General MacArthur had left a record of protests against the weakness of his forces, complaining bitterly that Truman's force reductions endangered the safety of his command. The army had reduced the Far Eastern Command well below half of its authorized strength, and lack of maintenance rendered the army ill-equipped for an emergency. On June 25, 80 percent of the army's sixty-day reserve of equipment was unusable, and the Far Eastern Command had only a forty-five day supply of ammunition available in its depots. With justice, MacArthur could have laid the unreadiness of his command at the feet of Truman and his budget cutters.<sup>70</sup>

Truman not only failed to provide the atomic and conventional forces necessary to make the Russians, Chinese, and North Koreans stay their hand, but he also neglected to provide the South Koreans with the weapons necessary to deter a conventional invasion. He had adopted a token aid program for Korea (and for other areas of low priority to the war planners), to permit the bulk of American military aid to go to Europe.

During the first five months of 1950, the Russians gave the North Koreans an offensive force—tactical aircraft, armor, trucks, and artillery—and the Chinese sent experienced Korean contingents from their army to man the spearheads, but even during this build-up, Truman and Acheson did not reinforce the South Korean armed forces with tanks, antitank guns, artillery, and planes. Intelligence reports indicated that the North Koreans were acquiring heavy weapons, but the Americans remained reluctant to increase their economic and military aid to Rhee while he was jailing his critics, postponing elections, threatening to invade the North, and failing to curb inflation. Truman had the funds to give Korea the planes and tanks needed to deter the North Koreans, for Congress had provided \$75 million for aid to the general area of China. Administration officials did draw up a tentative list of eventual recipients of the money, but they did not even include Korea on the list.<sup>71</sup>

The Truman administration's new central intelligence system also had not functioned properly. Conflicting reports masked the accurate warnings, which consequently did not dent complacency about Korea's

70. J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), pp. 67-68, 78-81, 84-85; James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War, Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of the Chief of Military History, 1972), pp. 46, 52-54, 58-60.

71. See *FRUS, 1950*, 7:8-11, 30-33, 43-44, 107-9.

safety in the upper ranks of government.<sup>72</sup> The South Koreans appealed repeatedly to the Truman administration to help deter the North Koreans, but Ambassador Jessup had told the Koreans not to "sit back and hope that the United States will cope with the situation alone. The strength of your defense against communism will be based on the strength of your economy and of a fundamental policy of political freedom." Even the commander of the U.S. Military Advisory Group in Korea, Gen. W. L. Roberts, reported in May that "Korea is threatened with the same disaster which befell China," due to a lack of equipment and spiraling inflation.<sup>73</sup> Such quotations combined with the failure to provide the South Koreans with a military commitment or adequate aid, would have provided Truman's critics with wonderful hooks on which to hang days of critical questions during hearings.

Truman compounded his vulnerability to a hostile investigation by downplaying the deficiencies. In late March 1950, Dwight D. Eisenhower, president of Columbia University and recently one of Truman's military advisers, told the Senate Appropriations Committee that Truman had reduced certain parts of America's defenses below the safety limit. Truman not only denied the charge completely but replied that he would have sought additional funds in the defense budget if he thought Eisenhower correct. When the drafters of NSC 68 called for a massive emergency rearmament program, Truman warned his subordinates of his desire "that no publicity be given to this report or its contents without my approval," and he sent the report out to the departments for cost analysis.<sup>74</sup> His critics might well complain that Truman had endangered the security of our allies and friends.

A second factor that helps to explain Truman's hasty decision is the influence of the anti-Communist campaign that gathered force in early 1950. In the six months immediately preceding the Korean decision, there were repeated attacks on Truman and Acheson's foreign policy. After the Republicans' surprising loss of the 1948 election, the conservative leaders of the party concluded that Thomas E. Dewey,

72. See Central Intelligence Agency, *Reviews of the World Situation* for May 17, 1950, and for June 14, 1950, in National Security Council Meetings, nos. 57 and 58, President's Secretary's Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Truman Library; Schnabel, *U.S. Army*, pp. 61-65.

73. *FRUS, 1950*, 7:22, 93.

74. Truman quotes no. 32, Special File, Truman, Harry S., box 1182, Robert A. Taft Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; for NSC 68, see *FRUS, 1950*, 1:234-92; Truman was not only hostile to large defense increases in the spring of 1950, but actually considering cutting the nondefense budget in order to hold the line, for he noted that tax receipts were falling and that the national debt ceiling was in danger; see Ayers diary, Apr. 20, 1950; this evidence undercuts assertions that Truman wanted to use the Korean crisis to increase the defense budget.



their presidential candidate, had been too gentle in his campaign against Truman, and they therefore decided to engage in bare-knuckle campaigning in the future. In the wake of the fall of China, they declared that Dean G. Acheson, Truman's secretary of state, and Philip C. Jessup, Truman's ambassador-at-large, were soft on Communists at home and abroad. Republican leaders had long since been charging that Truman's lax security procedures would result in the United States losing the secret of the A-bomb to the Russians, and during the campaign of 1948 the charges of espionage against Alger Hiss and the nuclear scientist Edward Condon led Truman to dismiss the spy scare as a "red herring"—a phrase that became a campaign issue and that Truman would regret after the Russians exploded their first bomb.<sup>75</sup> A series of shocking events fueled the charges that Truman had let the secret of the bomb slip away to the Russians: the serious atomic spy case of Klaus Fuchs (who confessed in February 1950); the arrests of Harry Gold, David Greenglass, and Julius Rosenberg on similar charges; and worst of all, the jury's conclusion in January 1950 that Alger Hiss, Acheson's former State Department colleague and personal friend, had lied during his espionage trial. These attacks combined with the Russian blockade of Berlin, the Soviet acquisition of the A-bomb, and the signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance to scare the American people badly.

The story of these irresponsible attacks on the Truman administration is well known; what is less well remembered is the extent to which Truman and Acheson yielded to the pressure. To undercut charges of laxity in internal security, Truman conducted a review and purge of government officials and put eleven leaders of the American Communist party on trial for conspiring to *advocate* the violent overthrow of the government.<sup>76</sup> In 1949 and 1950, Truman also yielded to Republican demands that he harden his stance in East Asia, for the Republicans had begun to concentrate heavy fire on Truman's policy in that region.

The initial assault came during the collapse of Chiang's China. After Mao conquered Manchuria and equipped his armies with American weapons that had been surrendered by the Nationalists, Truman considered stopping further arms shipments to China to prevent additional losses of American weapons to the Communists. Arthur Vandenberg, the usually cooperative Republican leader on the Senate

75. Herken, *Winning Weapon*, pp. 28, 272-73; Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, pp. 414-15; Dewey did not make much of the atomic espionage issue in the 1948 campaign.

76. Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 386-87.

Foreign Relations Committee, protested, and by March 1949, fifty senators had joined in petitioning Truman to send \$1.5 billion worth of money and arms to Chiang (an amount that approximated 10 percent of the American defense budget). The administration refused, arguing that Chinese forces had plenty of guns but lacked the will to use them, and Chiang's regime collapsed. On December 1, 1949, Senator H. Alexander Smith, a moderate Republican from New Jersey, recommended that Truman finally draw a line in Asia by occupying Formosa; and in January 1950, Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, a leading conservative candidate for president, joined Senator William F. Knowland of California and former President Herbert Hoover in advocating a cheaper means to accomplish the end—simply send the Seventh Fleet to the Formosa Strait. But the Democrats rallied behind Acheson when he refused to extend military support to Chiang.<sup>77</sup> If Truman and Acheson agreed to save the Nationalists on Formosa, they would be admitting that they had been wrong about Chiang's abilities during the earlier Chinese civil war.

In early January 1950, the Republican attack mounted in intensity. The State Department made the mistake of informing its public relations officers that they should blame the impending fall of Formosa on Chiang and that they should explain that Formosa was of little military value to the United States. Someone in Tokyo, probably in MacArthur's headquarters, released the gist of this paper to the press, and as a result, an outraged Knowland warned Acheson that the Republicans would denounce the administration's "spirit of defeatism."<sup>78</sup> To stop the campaign for aid to Formosa, Truman and Acheson tried to clarify their policy. On January 5, 1950, they responded to "leak and counterleak, gossip and counter-gossip" by stating that the United States had recognized that Formosa was part of China at the end of World War II. Acheson declared that the Americans could not retract their action at this late date by trying to reoccupy the island, nor did they desire to reenter the Chinese civil war by sending military aid or

77. A good summary of the China debate may be found in H. Bradford Westerfield, *Foreign Policy and Party Politics: Pearl Harbor to Korea* (New Haven: Octagon, 1955), pp. 343-82.

78. For the paper and Acheson's explanation of its origins, see U.S. Congress, Senate, Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, *Military Situation in the Far East: Joint Hearings to Conduct an Inquiry into the Military Situation in the Far East and the Facts Surrounding the Relief of General of the Army, Douglas MacArthur, from his Assignment in that Area*, testimony of Dean G. Acheson, vol. 3, 82nd Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1951), pt. 3, pp. 1667-74; for Knowland's threat, see *FRUS*, 1950, 6:258-63.



American forces to the area.<sup>79</sup> The Truman administration signaled Mao to take the island.

In response to the Republican attacks, however, the Truman administration was willing to take a harder line in the rest of Asia to compensate for their action on Formosa. On January 12, Acheson made a speech to the National Press Club in which he dealt with American policy in all of Asia. His tone was unbowing. Mao had *not* won because "we are incompetent; Chiang lost China because the Generalissimo displayed the 'grossest incompetence ever experienced by any military command.'" Acheson asked his audience to take comfort from the coming realization by the Chinese people that Stalin had large territorial ambitions in Northeast Asia—ambitions that Acheson contrasted with America's more modest defense perimeter in Asia, which ran from the Aleutians through Japan and Okinawa to the Philippines. Formosa, Korea, Indochina, and Indonesia were not included in the American defense lines and they would have to rely on the UN for protection.<sup>80</sup> In the rest of his speech Acheson pointed with pride to the administration's program of economic aid to true nationalists who would oppose Communist subversion, and he pointed to successes of greater or lesser degree in Japan, Korea, Indochina, and the Philippines.

Acheson hoped these statements would bring "clarity out of confusion,"<sup>81</sup> but things went very badly for the administration, for the Republicans immediately made good Knowland's threat to denounce Democratic defeatism in Asia. Taft had already told the Senate that the State Department was subverting Truman's containment policy, since it "has been guided by a left-wing group who obviously wanted to get rid of Chiang, and were [*sic*] willing at least to turn China over to the communists for that purpose." Styles Bridges, the Republican senator from New Hampshire, exclaimed that "China asked for a sword, and we gave her a dull paring knife."<sup>82</sup> During

79. Statement by the president, Jan. 5, 1950, U.S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy, 1950-55, Basic Documents*, General Foreign Policy Series, no. 117, Department of State Publication 6446 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957), pp. 2448-49; remarks by the secretary of state at a special news conference, Jan. 5, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 2449-56.

80. Address by the secretary of state, Jan. 12, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 2310-32; news conference, *ibid.*, p. 2452.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 2450.

82. Speech of Hon. Robert A. Taft of Ohio in the Senate of the United States, Jan. 11, 1950, Robert A. Taft Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, box 497, Legislative, Ch-Gi. Richard M. Fried, *Men against McCarthy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 4.

the furor over Formosa, Acheson emerged as "the administration's most vulnerable political target," when he said on January 5, 1950, that he would not turn his back on his friend Alger Hiss, in spite of the latter's conviction for perjury.

The Republicans welcomed the opportunity to charge the secretary of state with protecting a den of left-wing Communist sympathizers in the State Department. The Republican National Committee and the House and Senate Republican conferences opened the 1950 congressional campaign by promising a purge of "all communists, fellow travelers, and communist sympathizers."<sup>83</sup> And Senator Taft, possibly thinking of his own nascent candidacy, asserted that "The only way to get rid of the communists in the State Department is to change the head of government." Republican senator Kenneth Wherry of Nebraska even charged that Acheson himself was a "bad security risk."<sup>84</sup> The Republican attacks succeeded in shaking Acheson's standing with his party. Congressman John Jennings, a conservative Democrat, declared that Hiss and Acheson were "two birds of a feather," and Senator Scott Lucas, the Democratic majority leader in the Senate, warned that he would not defend Acheson's statement on Hiss if he were challenged to do so on the floor.<sup>85</sup>

The attack intensified when Joseph R. McCarthy (R., Wisconsin) seized the headlines by promising to name the traitors in the State Department and forced the Democrats to establish a committee to investigate his charges. Although Senator Millard Tydings, the Democratic chairman of the committee, and his Democratic colleagues tried to spike McCarthy's guns with facts, McCarthy outwitted them through the spring and early summer by rapidly shifting from one set of charges to another. Meanwhile Truman's loyalty reviews for government personnel, which he set in motion to quell McCarthy's charges, lent credence to McCarthy's attacks. McCarthy charged that Acheson and Jessup were "dilettante diplomats" who "whined" and "whimpered" and "cringed" in the face of communism.<sup>86</sup> Democrats were scared and demanded further concessions. On April 12, Tydings warned Truman that it was essential to "re-establish the White House and the Truman administration as the foe of communism at home as well as abroad," and the Democratic Majority Policy Committee devoted

83. Fried, *Men against McCarthy*, pp. 14, 21.

84. Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Lexington: Haydon, 1970), pp. 47, 73, 103, 173.

85. Fried, *Men against McCarthy*, pp. 14, 67.

86. Newspaper clippings, June 20, 1950, and undated, White House Central Files, Confidential File, box 22, folder 1, Korean Emergency, Truman Papers, Truman Library; Griffith, *Politics of Fear*, pp. 67-87; 89-90.



careful attention to McCarthy's campaign at each of its meetings from March 14 through May 2 as did Truman's personal staff.<sup>87</sup>

Step by step, Truman and Acheson yielded to Republican pressure and to the pleas of their colleagues. To avoid charges of a cover-up of internal security problems, Truman handed over the personnel files that the Tydings Committee demanded; the administration indicted William Remington, a Commerce Department employee, on an espionage charge; and they discharged a number of suspected homosexuals from the State Department.<sup>88</sup> Acheson also tried to blunt the edge of attacks on him by advocating "total diplomacy," a policy that comprised no negotiations with the Russians until the creation of "situations of strength" that would force the Russians to recognize the boundaries between their sphere and that of the Americans; resistance to Soviet efforts to confuse and divide the American people; and a defiant fight against the Communist doctrines that the Russians were using as tools in their campaign to control the world.<sup>89</sup>

Acheson and his subordinates also responded to the Republican attacks by extending containment in Asia. When Stalin and Mao recognized Ho Chi Minh's government in January 1950, Truman and Acheson recognized the French puppet regime of Bao Dai and extended military aid to it. And in late May, Acheson agreed to spend some of the remaining economic aid funds in Formosa. Acheson's projected "situation of strength" in East Asia thus took shape partially in response to McCarthyite attacks on the eve of the Korean War. NSC 68 was a trump card that Acheson suggested that Truman play by making a "powerful and concrete speech on foreign affairs," when the paper on massive rearmament was ready for implementation.<sup>90</sup>

Truman was quite concerned about the McCarthyite attacks. He wrote to Senator Bridges asking him to tone down his attacks on Acheson, and he considered delivering a radio talk to the nation on security matters. One of his press aides argued that such an address was necessary, for "there is growing confusion among the people and

87. Fried, *Men against McCarthy*, pp. 74-76; Ayers diary, Mar. 27, Apr. 2, 1950, Truman Library.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 75.

89. R. Love to R.G. Barnes, summary of the main points concerning the relationship between the U.S. and the USSR brought out by Secretary Acheson in his public announcements since Feb. 8, 1950, June 5, 1950, Memoranda of Conversations, Acheson Papers, Truman Library, box 65, 5-1-50 to 6-28-50.

90. *FRUS*, 1950, 6:694-95, 716-19, 743-47, 786-87; Westerfield, *Foreign Policy and Party Politics*, pp. 368-69; Acheson's memorandum of conversation with the president, May 1, 1950; Memoranda of Conversation, Acheson Papers, box 65, 5-1-50 to 6-28-50.

something in the nature of hysteria spreading among them that only the President can halt."<sup>91</sup> And Truman himself was vulnerable to McCarthyite smears. McCarthy was charging that Acheson had direct ties to Owen Lattimore, an Asianist from Johns Hopkins University who had served as an adviser to Chiang K'ai shek, and whom McCarthy had accused of being the most important Soviet agent in the United States. In April, Truman's press aides discovered an exchange of letters between Truman and Lattimore in 1945 that indicated that Truman had made a special effort to meet Lattimore before leaving for the Potsdam Conference. Worse still, the letters made clear that Lattimore had urged Truman not to back Chiang completely, but to keep the door open to the Chinese Communists to persuade the Russians to accept a stable Asian settlement. The newspapers were already charging that Lattimore had met with Acheson, and Acheson was denying it.<sup>92</sup> The same question might prove embarrassing for Truman, if McCarthy asked it of him or of Lattimore.

President Truman tried to shore up his own standing by bringing in two certified anti-Communist Republicans to help Acheson make foreign policy; he appointed John Sherman Cooper and John Foster Dulles as ambassadors-at-large. Dulles agreed to enter the Truman administration on the condition that he would have a large say in future decisions on East Asian policy. On April 28, 1950, Dulles told Truman that he would only be able to restrain Senators Taft, Milliken, and Bridges (McCarthy's more respectable supporters), if Truman allowed Dulles to plan some "early affirmative action" against the "communist menace." If he had no role in policy, Dulles said, then he would have little influence with his more aggressive colleagues. He continued, "A good deal would, of course, depend on whether I was in a position to help work out policies that I could genuinely endorse. The President said he fully understood that this would be the course events would have to take. . . ." Dulles added that "many Americans have lost confidence as a result of what happened, particularly in the East. It was this lack of confidence which . . . made it possible for men like McCarthy to make a deep impression. . . . If we could really get going, the American people would fall in behind that leadership and attacks like McCarthy's would be forgotten." Dulles informed Acheson that the president "quite agreed with my analysis."<sup>93</sup>

91. Ayers diary, Mar. 27, 1950.

92. *Ibid.*, Apr. 2, 1950.

93. Dulles to Acheson, May 2, 1950, enclosing his Personal and Confidential Memorandum of Conversation with President Truman, Apr. 28, 1950; Memoranda of Conversation, Acheson Papers, box 65, 4-3-50 to 4-28-50; Truman did not find Dulles an altogether satisfactory instrument for he accused Dulles on Aug. 17,



Truman and Acheson began reaping benefits from their attempt to reestablish bipartisanship. After Dulles's appointment, Governor Dewey, Dulles's sponsor and a perennial presidential candidate who was highly critical of Truman's record in Asia, began consulting Acheson by phone before speaking out on China policy.<sup>94</sup> Dulles, however, quickly joined a group *within* the administration advocating the extension of military aid to Formosa. Dulles and Dean Rusk, the new assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern Affairs, set out to persuade Truman that Taiwan was a good place to "draw the line . . . [for the island was important] politically if not strategically." For the past year Louis Johnson, the secretary of defense and the leader of the Asian hard liners, had been trying to convince the JCS to agree to a military commitment to help Chiang defend Formosa, and in June Johnson traveled to the Far East to consult General MacArthur on the question. MacArthur sent Johnson and Bradley home with a memorandum strongly endorsing the extension of aid to Formosa.<sup>95</sup>

Rusk and Dulles also decided to harden the administration's stance on South Korea. By threatening to cut economic aid to Korea, Acheson had been trying to persuade Syngman Rhee to release his political prisoners, to hold elections on time, and to adopt a budget and tax system that would help to control inflation. Senator Tom Connally then increased concern among the advocates of the hard line in Asia by declaring on May 5 that Russia could "overrun Korea just like she probably will overrun Formosa. . . ." When an interview asked whether or not Korea was an essential part of America's defense perimeter, Connally said that it was not.<sup>96</sup> Acheson allowed Dulles to travel to South

1950, of writing an attack that Republican senators on the Foreign Relations Committee had made on administration foreign policy. Dulles replied that he had not written it and that he had tried to make changes in it, but had failed; Ayers diary, Aug. 17, 1950.

94. L.D.B[attle] memo, Apr. 10, 1950, Acheson Papers, box 65, 4-3-50 to 4-28-50.

95. See Dulles's memorandum of May 18, 1950, which seems to have strayed from the *FRUS* volume on China into *FRUS*, 1950, 1:314-16; the story of the developing drive within the administration to yield to the Republicans by including Formosa in the American defense perimeter can be followed in *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 6; see especially memoranda by Fischer Howe and Dean Rusk of May 30, 31, 1950, pp. 347-51; see Jessup's covering note of June 30, 1950, on his record of the Blair House meeting of June 25, 1950, in box 65, Memoranda of Conversation, May 1, 1950, to June 28, 1950, Acheson Papers; the thoughts of Bradley and MacArthur on Formosa, and the opposition of the service chiefs to assuming the burden of Formosan defense, may be found attached to Bradley's memo of June 25, 1950, to H. Vandenberg, et al. in RG 218, CCS, decimal file 381, Formosa (11-8-48), sec. 3, National Archives.

96. See *FRUS*, 1950, 7:43-44, 65-66.

Korea and tell the National Assembly that South Korea did not stand alone in the struggle against communism as long as it behaved in a worthy fashion. Dulles made his declaration five days before the North Koreans invaded.<sup>97</sup>

In the weeks preceding the North Korean invasion, then, Truman and Acheson found a storm gathering over their Asian policy. Johnson, Dulles, Rusk, and MacArthur were about to renew their demands that Truman extend military aid to Chiang; Dulles was hardening the American commitment to South Korea; and McCarthy was gaining ground with charges of lax security and softness on communism. At the end of April, after his appointment of Dulles, Truman had been optimistic about discrediting McCarthy through Senator Tydings's investigation, but by early June he had given up on Tydings, who was in "a state of panic" and had "fallen down." On June 22, Senators Tydings and McMahon joined Clark Clifford, one of the president's principal political advisers, in telling Truman that the Communist issue would hurt the Democrats in the coming campaign; they proposed the creation of a special commission to investigate McCarthy's charges. The matter was still pending when the Korean War broke out. Meanwhile, in the Gallup poll for May, Truman sank very low indeed: 44 percent disapproved of his performance; 19 percent were undecided; and only 37 percent approved.<sup>98</sup>

Truman and Acheson decided for war without a full debate on the military implications of their decision. Ernest R. May has demonstrated that Truman made his basic decision to intervene against the North Koreans very early in the decision-making process, though the president waited five days before engaging ground troops.<sup>99</sup> Truman delayed the dispatch of American ground forces by MacArthur for a variety of reasons: he wanted to let the South Koreans try to stop the invasion on their own (he told a relative on June 26 that "the Korean situation . . . is not as bad as people would have you think"); he had to bring his cabinet into line; and he needed to reassure himself that Russian forces were not massing for an attack elsewhere. But there is considerable evidence that he had made up his mind to do whatever was necessary from the outset and therefore only considered how best to inter-

97. See U.S. Department of State, *State Department Bulletin*, July 3, 1950.

98. Ayers diary, Apr. 29, June 8, 1950; Fried, *Men Against McCarthy*, pp. 81-85; *U.S. News & World Report*, May 5, 1950.

99. Ernest R. May, "Lessons" of the Past: *The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 70-78; May argues that Truman made up his mind in the first day; we now have good evidence that he hoped to avoid sending troops until June 26 and that he made up his mind completely by June 28 (see note 108).



vene. On Sunday, June 25, one of Truman's aides told a reporter, "The boss is going to hit those fellows hard," and on the same day, Margaret Truman told her diary "Communist Korea is marching in on Southern Korea and we are going to fight."<sup>100</sup>

Truman seriously prejudiced his decision even before he met his advisers during the Blair House conferences. He had Acheson ask the United Nations Security Council to seek a North Korean withdrawal and on the next day, Truman told the American people that the "lawless" North Koreans were engaging in "unprovoked aggression." He promised that the United States would "*vigorously support*" the efforts of the UN "to terminate this serious breach of the peace."<sup>101</sup>

The records of the two Blair House meetings of June 25 and 26 indicate that Truman invited the generals of the JCS to join the group from the outset and that he and Acheson pushed the discussion toward military action. On June 26, with Seoul in danger, Acheson proposed escalatory steps at the outset of the meeting, and Truman approved each one immediately, without inviting discussion. And when Louis Johnson, Frank Pace, and Omar Bradley warned Truman against sending ground troops to Korea, the president greeted their advice with silence. When the director of the Joint Staff of the JCS told the members of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee to recommend a course of action in case American air strikes did not stop the North Korean invasion, he warned its members that the JCS "do *not* want to commit troops,"<sup>102</sup> but Truman did not ask the chiefs to calculate the potential military costs.

Before consulting his military advisers, then, Truman tilted the debate toward the question of *how* to save Korea, rather than *whether* to save it, and Truman and Acheson did not fully consider either a face-saving retreat by appealing to the Security Council for economic sanctions or accepting the loss of Korea,<sup>103</sup> while blaming the loss on MacArthur's failure to anticipate the attack and on the Republicans' demands for a balanced budget.

The politically explosive question of Formosa reappeared imme-

100. Truman to Grace Sumner, June 26, 1950, PSF, Family Correspondence File, box 331, Truman Papers; Paige, *Korean Decision*, p. 114; Margaret Truman, *Margaret Truman's Own Story: Souvenir* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), p. 275.

101. *FRUS*, 1950, 7:127-28, 171; italics are mine.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 167-75, 178-83, 255; May makes the point that Truman included the JCS from the outset; see May, "*Lessons*," p. 70. Schnabel and Watson, "History of JCS," 3, pt. 1: 101.

103. See May, "*Lessons*," p. 73, for a treatment of options.

diately on June 25, setting the Korean decision in the context of partisan attacks on the administration's East Asian policy. At the first Blair House meeting, before any discussion of Korea, Bradley, who had just returned from visiting MacArthur with Johnson, read aloud MacArthur's memorandum in which MacArthur endorsed the McCarthyite position on military aid to Chiang.<sup>104</sup>

Pressure from the Republicans for action in South Korea mounted from the start of the attack. On June 26, when it appeared that the South Koreans might succeed in blunting the invasion, the Senate Republican Policy Committee declared that the United States should give maximum military aid to Korea, but it covered its bets by also asserting that Truman should not allow the clash to drag the United States into a war. Other Republicans were much more willing to press for action. Dulles cabled from Tokyo on June 25 that "U.S. force should be used even though this risks Russian counter moves."<sup>105</sup> Senator William F. Knowland (R., Calif.) warned on the same day that difficult decisions could not be "permanently pushed aside," and in a bitter exchange with Senator Tom Connally (D., Texas) he asked whether "we should sit back and twiddle our thumbs . . . ?" Senator George W. Malone (R., Nevada) said, "It is fairly clear that what happened in China and what is now happening in Korea were brought about deliberately by the advisers of the President at Yalta and by the advisers of the State Department since then." And after Senator William E. Jenner (R., Indiana) endorsed Malone's charge, Senator McCarthy inserted a severe attack on Acheson into the *Congressional Record*. On June 27, Republicans and Democrats alike joined in approving Truman's decision to use air and sea power against the North Koreans, though Malone and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. (R., Mass.) urged the use of ground troops, if necessary.

During the late morning of June 28, Senator Robert A. Taft (R., Ohio), a leading presidential contender, charged that two factors had produced the Korean crisis: "First . . . the outrageous aggressive attitude of Soviet Russia, and second . . . the bungling and inconsistent foreign policy of the administration." Taft told the Senate that Truman

104. *FRUS*, 1950, 7:157-65, and Jessup's covering letter of June 30 on his minutes of the June 25 meeting in Memoranda of Conversation, box 65, 5-1-50 to 6-28-50, Acheson Papers.

105. Paige, *Korean Decision*, p. 154. For Dulles's telegram, see *FRUS*, 1950, 7:140; after the decision to send troops, Dulles covered himself by explaining to Acheson that he had only meant for Truman to send air and sea forces, not troops; see "Memo of Conversation," July 1, 1950, Dulles Papers, Princeton, cited in "History of JCS," 3, pt. 1:70, n. 31.



was guilty of dividing Korea, withdrawing U.S. armed forces from the South, and failing to resist Communist expansion in China. When Taft suggested that Acheson resign, McCarthy, Jenner, and the Senate galleries burst into applause. Meanwhile cries of betrayal came in from Korea. Rhee told the press that he was "greatly disappointed with American aid. . .," which was "too little and too late."<sup>106</sup>

The Democrats, both liberals and conservatives, demanded action. Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia said, "I believe we have a responsibility to assist South Korea," and John A. McCormack, House Democratic leader, declared, "One has to wait to see what develops, but . . . Stalin and his gang are out to control the world." Senator Connally told the Senate that the president was carefully pondering a decision to send military forces, but Connally added that Truman "is not going to tremble like a psychopath before the Russian power."<sup>107</sup> Liberal Democrats were also worried about the Republican onslaught. Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney's letter of June 27 establishes the political context of Truman's decision:

Dear Mr. President:

This is a hasty note to confirm in writing the message I shall presently telephone to Mr. Connally [*sic*] for your information.

The testimony which is being offered to the Appropriations Committee indicates that although for more than a year Central Intelligence has been reporting evidence of aggressive preparations in North Korea, no steps have been taken under the Mutual Defense Assistance Program to provide South Korea with any equipment capable of use in resisting an invasion from the north. . . .

You will see that the testimony which I have sketchily summarized will undoubtedly be used to support a charge that our policy was soft toward the Communists in Korea.

O'Mahoney suggested that Truman announce that the United States would veto the admission of Communist China into the UN. In reply Truman admitted to half of the failure, but assured the worried senator that he had the remedy to Republican attacks. While American prewar aid had only been for "internal security and to prevent raids across the Northern border . . . I think we have now covered the situation [by using air and sea forces against the North Koreans] to a point where we will either get results *or we will have to go all-out to maintain our position.*"<sup>108</sup>

106. Paige, *Korean Decision*, pp. 150-56, 193-200, 216-18; see also the speech titled "The Korean Crisis Caused by Wavering Foreign Policies of Administration: By Taft in the Senate," June 28, 1950, 1950 Political Campaign Misc., G-L, box 258, Taft Papers; *Washington Post*, June 27, 1950.

107. *Washington Post*, June 27, 1950.

108. For O'Mahoney's letter of June 27, 1950, and Truman's reply of June 28, 1950, see box 243, Korean War File, Truman Papers, Truman Library (italics mine).

On June 27, the day O'Mahoney called the White House, Truman told congressional leaders that the United States was committed to defend South Korea from invasion and at the same time he announced that he was neutralizing Taiwan by sending the Seventh Fleet to patrol Formosa Strait.

Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson tried to use Taft's criticism to finish off Acheson. On June 29, in Harriman's presence, Johnson called Senator Taft on the phone to congratulate him on his Senate speech of the previous afternoon in which Taft called for Acheson's resignation. Johnson then turned to Harriman and said if they could get Acheson out he (Johnson) would see that Harriman was made Secretary of State. During Truman's preparatory briefing for his press conference that same day the president's press aides warned him that newspaper columnists were claiming that Taft had predicted that Acheson was on his way out, because Acheson had unsuccessfully opposed the Korean intervention and because Truman had reversed the secretary's Formosan policy. Truman's aides blamed the stories on Johnson, and Truman said, "If this keeps up, we're going to have a new Secretary of Defense." Truman added that the charges against Acheson were untrue, and when he met the press he chastised Taft for his "political statement" during a period of national crisis.<sup>109</sup>

In the early hours of the following morning, when MacArthur demanded permission to send American troops into combat to prevent all of South Korea from being overrun, Truman agreed to commit a regimental combat team, and he did so without further consultation with his military advisers. For both international and domestic political reasons he could not afford to reject MacArthur's request.<sup>110</sup>

Political needs as well as the impact of crisis created misperception. Truman and Acheson needed to interpret the North Korean attack as part of a global challenge to justify reversing their Asian policy, and they therefore argued that by saving South Korea, they would also preserve East Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the UN from the Communist onslaught.<sup>111</sup> They were well aware that the decision

109. Ayers diary, June 29, 1950; June 29 press conference in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Harry S. Truman, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President*, Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 1950 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1965), pp. 496-504.

110. For Truman's fears of MacArthur as a political threat see Ayers diary, July 1, 1950.

111. For Truman's justification of the Korean intervention in terms of a global challenge, see *Public Papers*, pp. 491-92, and Elsey's minutes of Truman's meeting with congressional leaders, June 27, 1950, Korea File, George Elsey Papers, Truman Library; for Acheson's position in which he restricted the probability of



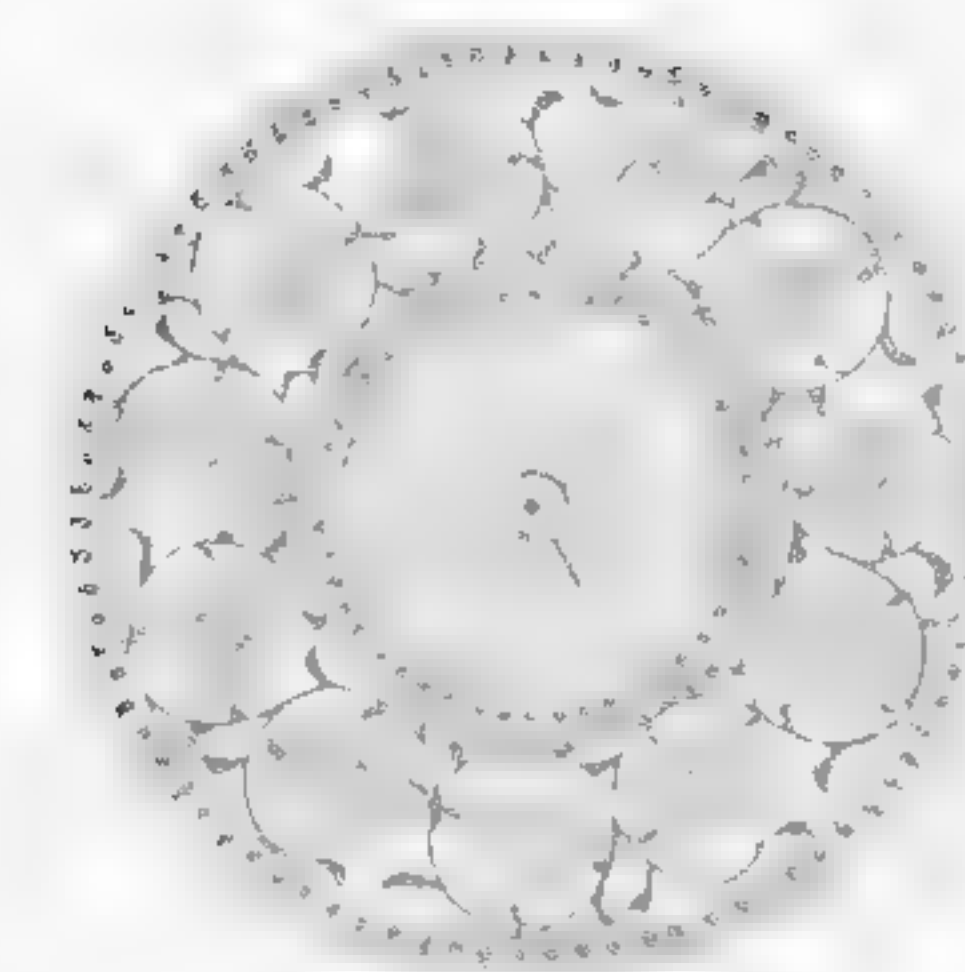
to send forces into Korea imposed real military risks. On June 28, during an NSC meeting, Truman expressed fear of becoming so deeply involved in Korea that the United States could not meet an attack elsewhere, and Acheson warned that "the Soviets might not intervene themselves in Korea, but might utilize the Chinese Communists."<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless Truman consoled himself with the hope that the United States could drive the North Koreans back to the thirty-eighth parallel with only a small number of divisions.

America's Korean decisions in the years from 1940 to 1950 were poor indeed. Roosevelt considered Korea a very minor problem and hoped to dispense with its international complications under the unsuitable trusteeship formula, which was the only option he considered. Truman tried to implement Roosevelt's trusteeship policy by sending troops to Korea and then failed to reconsider his Korean involvement when costs began to mount. What started as rhetoric with Roosevelt hardened into an American commitment under Truman, but Truman refused to accept his liability. He did not create a deterrent force structure on the peninsula, nor did he make a clear verbal commitment to defend the area, thereby inadvertently inviting the attack. Satisficed or uncoordinated decisions by both Truman and Roosevelt led to crises in August 1945 and in June 1950, and the crisis decisions of these months saddled the Korean people with foreign occupation and eventually with three years of devastating war.

---

falling dominoes to Asia, see Acheson's memo of conversation with Ambassador W.M. de Morgenstierne, June 30, 1950, Memoranda of Conversations, box 65, 5-1-50 to 6-28-50, Acheson Papers.

112. Minutes of 59th meeting of the NSC, June 28, 1950, PSF, Truman Papers, Truman Library.



## Internal Warfare in Korea, 1948–1950: The Local Setting of the Korean War

JOHN MERRILL

LITTLE IS KNOWN, EVEN YET, ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF THE KOREAN WAR. IT has become commonplace, in fact, to preface discussions with the disclaimer that, like the morning fog that covers that not so peaceful land, there is much about the war that remains clouded, obscure, and wrapped in mystery. It is not for lack of theories. The war has been variously attributed to the perfidy of Syngman Rhee, factional disputes within the North Korean leadership, the first stirrings of the Sino-Soviet conflict, and the imperatives of either U.S. or Soviet foreign policy. Political satirists have begun to exploit the potential of this confusion. Kim Tong-gil's recent best seller, *The President's Laughter*,<sup>1</sup> which barely made it past the Korean censors, is one example. The book spins a surrealistic tale of how Stalin, his senses numbed by an excess of wine and beautiful P'yŏngyang *kisaeng* (geisha, entertainer), finally agreed to Kim Il-sung's persistent requests to support an attack on the

1. Kim Tong-gil, *Taet'ongnyŏng ŭi usŏm* [The president's laughter] (Seoul, 1975).



South. As history, Kim's satire is probably not much worse than many of the more serious attempts to explain the war put forth by both scholars and propagandists.

There are several reasons for this lack of understanding, but perhaps most important is that our images of Korea were set at the height of the cold war in the mold of our World War II experience with surprise attacks across international boundaries. There was an understandable tendency to interpret Korea in these same terms, and to relate it exclusively to the global pattern of interaction between the United States and the Soviet Union. This inclination was reinforced by the long history of great-power involvement on the peninsula that made it natural to see events in Korea as determined by what went on elsewhere in the international system.

Information on Korea has also been limited. Interest in Korea has never been great, and during the years preceding the war both Syngman Rhee and the American Military Government took care to censor news leaving the country. The public was thus not prepared for the North Korean attack. Moreover, until recently primary sources necessary for a study of the origins of the war have not been available. Karunakar Gupta's article, which appeared in the *China Quarterly*, is a good example. His account is based entirely on newspaper clippings he collected during his student days in Europe on events that occurred during the first days of the war.<sup>2</sup>

The two Koreas have not been forthright in their versions of the origins of the war.<sup>3</sup> The history of these years poses special problems since it raises questions concerning the legitimacy of the two states, the role of leading personalities in prewar events, and responsibility for the war. Most North Korean accounts have been either official white papers on alleged U.S. aggression or party histories of Kim Il-sung's struggle against factional elements in the Workers' party. South Korean accounts have tended to be military histories compiled by committees of scholars that are less than candid about the extent of violence in the Republic of Korea (ROK) before the war. The problem is compounded by the reluctance of North Korea's allies to discuss anything about the war that might damage their relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Authors have begun to examine previously neglected local factors and to reconsider the relationships of the two Koreas to their allies.

2. Karunakar Gupta, "How Did the Korean War Begin?" *China Quarterly*, October-December 1972, pp. 699-716.

3. Recent accounts are Kim Chum-kon, *The Korean War* (Seoul: Kwangmyŏng Publishing Co., 1973); and *The U.S. Imperialists Started the Korean War* (P'yŏng-yang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977).

This trend has been strengthened by the burgeoning literature on the "big power of small allies" and the growing volume of revisionist histories of the cold war. Nevertheless, the lack of primary sources on the war has caused some authors to resort to exercises in textual exegesis to extract from the available material (sometimes in translation) more than is there. There is also the difficulty of choosing an appropriate time frame. The question of the origins of the war can be completely sidestepped if, as is often true of Communist accounts, one talks only about the subsequent U.S. intervention. Viewing the North Korean attack as an impulsive decision also ignores the need to examine the local background. Where is the best place to begin? With the liberation in 1945, when the American Military Government's decision to suppress the People's Committees becomes the crucial event? With the outpouring of popular discontent evident in the demonstrations against the military government in October 1946? Or later? Finally, there is the failure to place the war within some wider theoretical framework, a failure characteristic of many recent Western works. This is a problem especially if one sees the war as the result of a complex interplay of local and international factors and not simply of U.S. imperialism or Communist aggression, which tell us nothing about the timing of the attack except in the most round-about way. The words "civil war" and "intervention" are frequently used to describe the war and they offer a useful starting point, but no attempt has yet been made to place the Korean case within the extensive literature on these subjects.

Korea continues to be a major trouble spot, with the highest concentration of weapons and men under arms anywhere in the world. The Carter administration's aborted plan to withdraw U.S. ground forces from the peninsula focused new attention on the issue of Korean security. Critics of Carter's policy appealed to the lessons of the past by pointing to the disastrous consequences of our troop withdrawal from Korea in 1949. But, given the controversy that still surrounds the war, it is not clear just what these lessons are. American liberals are poorly equipped to come to grips with either the war or present policy toward Korea. They have always been somewhat ambivalent about our involvement in Korea, and their unease has grown with recent revelations of influence buying in Washington and human rights violations in Seoul. Many American liberals, otherwise committed to internationalist views of collective security, are troubled by the difficulty of reconciling the negative consequences of our involvement in Korea with the ideals that it once so clearly represented. The Korean War fits neither the World War II model nor our more recent experience in Vietnam. A better understanding of the history of the war may not



resolve present policy dilemmas, but it is a necessary first step to any new departures. Finally, the Korean War is important as the forerunner of a type of intervention by lesser powers that has become increasingly common in the post-World War II international system. A long-run trend toward greater equalization of military power has permitted smaller states, acting independently or with the support of their allies, to intervene much more frequently in neighboring countries disrupted by civil strife. Korea is a useful test case for theories of interventionary behavior and a means to explore its early stages.

The following discussion examines the outbreak of the Korean War in the context of domestic political violence. The relationships between local and international factors are explored, and the North Korean attack is studied from the perspective of theories of interventionary behavior. Rather than adopting a decision-making approach that would require data unavailable for North Korea, the analysis will look at the background of the North Korean attack in broad situational terms.

#### PATTERNS OF NORTH-SOUTH INTERACTION BEFORE THE WAR

The most striking characteristic of Korean domestic politics in the years before the war was a persistent pattern of political violence that resulted in approximately one hundred thousand casualties before June 1950. This civil war between Left and Right has received only little attention, but it is impossible to understand the origins of the war without considering it. Gregory Henderson points out that the October 1946 uprisings in the American zone established "an enduring pattern of subversion and repression . . . from which an unbroken chain stretched to the subversion attempts of Communists in later months, the infiltration of the constabulary, the revolt of Yösu in 1948, and the rise of guerrilla activity thereafter, which ebbed only in the spring before the Korean war."<sup>4</sup> The account presented here begins somewhat later, with the arrival of the United Nations Temporary Commission in early 1948, and takes Henderson's analysis a step further by viewing the war itself as the last link in the chain of internal violence.

U.S. Army data contain a great deal of information about internal warfare in Korea during this period. The most accessible is the Far Eastern Command's daily *Intelligence Summaries*, which about every two weeks listed in tabular form information on both guerrilla activity in the ROK and incidents along the thirty-eighth parallel. The notorious "body counts" of Vietnam have put us on guard when examining such

statistics, and it would be foolish to deny that there are similar problems with the army data for Korea. Every border incident, for instance, is reported as initiated by the North, although we know from other sources that the majority were started by the South. Moreover, casualty figures on the northern side must have been virtually impossible to determine. Finally, the border clashes seem to have been deliberately played up by the South to demonstrate their need for more arms. For these reasons, statistical data on border incidents have not been presented here.

The army data on guerrilla incidents in the South are better, yet they should not be viewed as indicating the absolute magnitude of political violence in South Korea before the war. They greatly understate the seriousness of these incidents for several reasons. First, many incidents from remote rural areas (where the guerrillas were strongest) were not reported due to inadequate communications facilities. Second, the FEC data are several stages removed from the actual events, and many incidents may have been filtered out in the reporting process. Where field reports by American observers are available as a cross check—such as for some periods of the Cheju-do Rebellion—they indicate a much higher level of guerrilla activity. Third, since the data were conveyed through army channels they probably do not fully reflect casualties caused by the Korean police. Finally, the reporting system itself seems to have broken down during periods of especially heavy fighting, such as at Yösu. Nevertheless, the data do reveal the seriousness of internal violence and its general trend.

The data are summarized in figure 1. Looking at the figure, three things become apparent: first of all, it is clear that the level of political violence surged after the establishment of the two governments in Korea in the fall of 1948, specifically with the Yösu Rebellion in October, two months after the establishment of the ROK. (Although not shown, border incidents also increased markedly as the August 15 date for the transfer of authority to the Rhee government approached, and American troops began to turn over their positions on the parallel to their South Korean counterparts; the last U.S. tactical forces, however, did not leave until June 1949.) Second, the intensity of fighting increased greatly in the months after Yösu and peaked during the winter of 1949-50. Thereafter, guerrilla activity declined sharply in a period of artificial quiet in the months before the war. Third, the chart shows a number of distinct periods in the development of internal warfare in South Korea between 1948 and 1950. Used in conjunction with other information, they can serve as a guide to the changing pattern of interaction between the two Koreas in the years before the war. The broad outlines of six such periods can, in fact, be identified,

4. Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) p. 147.



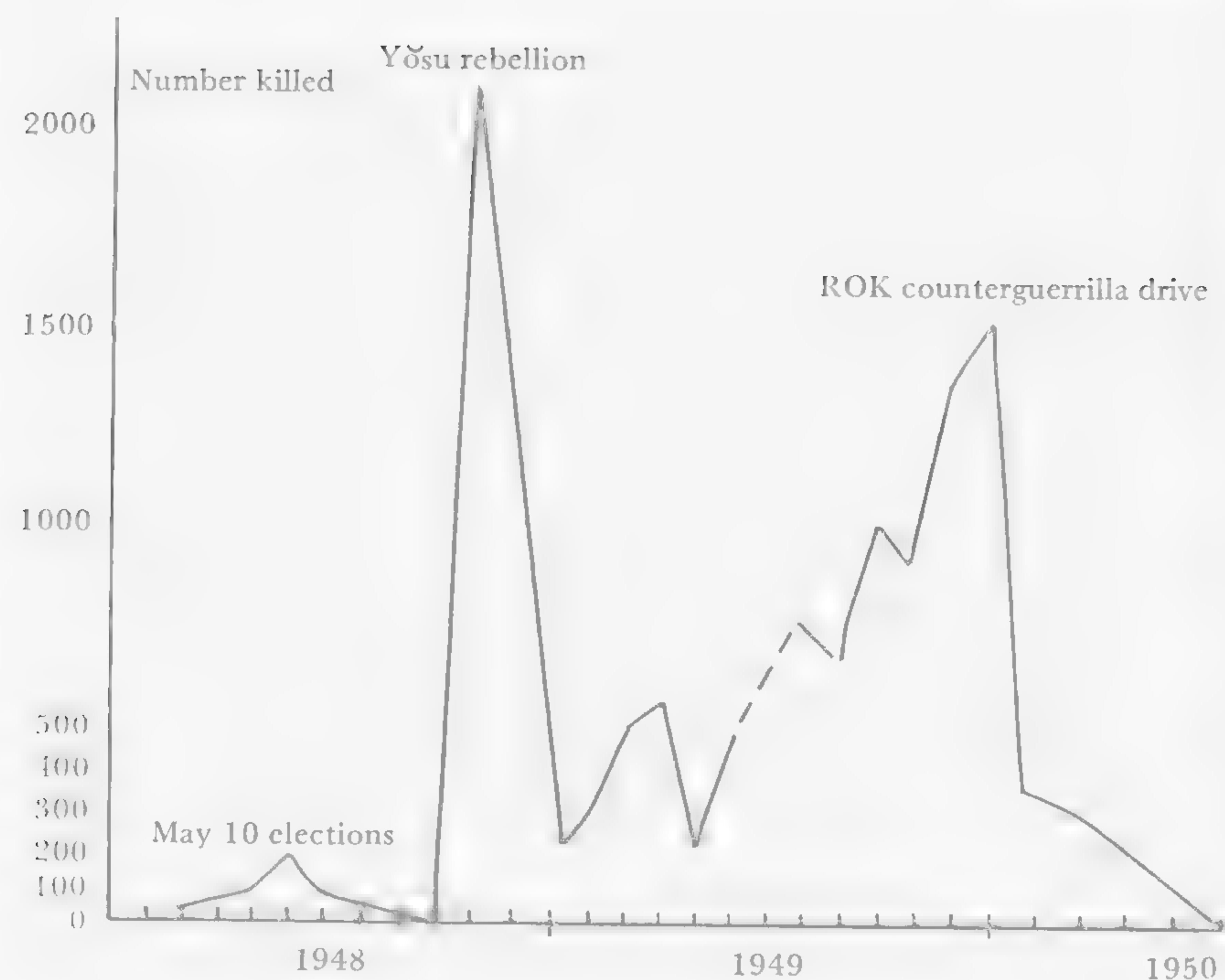


Fig. 1. Far East Command data on guerrilla activity in South Korea, 1948-1950 (data on Yosu rebellion from MBC and Dong-a Ilbo, *Sinyŏn Kwa yongkwang ŭi minjok-sa* [Seoul, 1975]).

In each of them, the extent and type of foreign involvement, the issues around which the political struggle revolved, and the military balance on the peninsula were different.

In general, the approach used here in describing the interaction between North and South Korea before the war is similar to Charles McClelland's in his analysis of the Taiwan Strait crisis. McClelland found that the development of a crisis is not random, but exhibits patterns of action and reaction, temporary status quos, and systems of tacit communication that can be uncovered by charting the flow of events. Once the main stages in the evolution of a crisis are identified and their characteristics described, the reasons for the transitions from one to another can be analyzed. This approach has the advantage of bypassing the thorny problem of trying to determine the real motives of statesmen in situations where sufficient information is unavailable.

We can summarize the stages in the development of the Korean crisis as follows:

1. A period of rapidly escalating political violence and polarization of opinion between Left and Right, precipitated by the arrival of the

UN Commission in January 1948, and culminating in the Cheju-do Rebellion in April.

2. A lull in guerrilla activity during the summer of 1948 as both the South Korean Labor Party (SKLP) and the American Military Government concentrated on preparations for the establishment of rival governments.

3. A period of acute crisis for the new ROK government after the Yosu Rebellion during which its very survival seemed at stake.

4. An upsurge in border clashes and naval incidents in the spring and summer of 1949 caused primarily by a much more aggressive southern policy vis-à-vis the North.

5. A period of heavy fighting in South Korea during the winter of 1949-50 in which the military arm of the SKLP was virtually destroyed.

6. A period of artificial quiet just before the war when the political situation in the ROK and the regional balance of power in East Asia underwent major changes.

The first period (fall 1947-spring 1948) began with the establishment of the UN Temporary Commission, which made the Korean question no longer a matter of bilateral Soviet-U.S. negotiations and began the process that led to the setting up of separate governments in the two occupation zones. The Commission's presence in the South prompted an opposition campaign by the SKLP that escalated from demonstrations to sabotage to a major popular rebellion on Cheju-do. The period also saw the isolation of moderate and right-wing opponents of Rhee, who alone among major political leaders supported separate elections in the South. The pull of Korean nationalism was great enough to attract many of Rhee's opponents to a North Korean-sponsored unification conference held in Haeju. The U.S. government, anxious to pull out of Korea, pushed hard for UN involvement.<sup>5</sup> The decision to hold separate elections ran counter to the opinion of most members of the UN Commission and Korean political leaders. The SKLP campaign against separate elections plunged Cheju-do into more than a year of bloody internecine warfare, resulting in the deaths of 15 percent of its population (some thirty to forty thousand people).

The complexity of the Communist response to the UN Commission

5. I have relied on three recent Ph.D. dissertations for details on the evolution of American policy towards Korea during the 1948-1950 period: Charles M. Dobbs, "American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea" (Indiana University, 1978); James I. Matray, "The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950" (University of Virginia, 1977); and Kenneth R. Mauck, "The Formation of American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1945-1953" (University of Oklahoma, 1978).



reflected deep divisions within the Korean leadership over the proper strategy to adopt toward the commission. The initial reaction to its formation in the North Korean press was relatively mild. And although the commission was not admitted into the Russian zone, the P'yŏng-yang authorities ordered a sprucing-up drive to prepare the city for a possible visit.<sup>6</sup> Most SKLP leaders believed that a wave of arrests earlier in the year had left the party too weak to actively oppose the work of the commission, but Pak Hŏn-yŏng's more militant view was that the SKLP should lead a mass campaign against it "modelled on the October 1946 People's Resistance."<sup>7</sup> He was later criticized for leading an "adventurous charge" that needlessly exposed the party organization to attack, but his position made sense at the time. There was widespread public speculation about the extent of divisions within the commission, and Pak may have felt that a show of opposition would influence its decision.<sup>8</sup>

The SKLP called a three-day general strike beginning on February 7 that was accompanied by sabotage, mass demonstrations, and attacks on police boxes. More than forty railroad locomotives were disabled in one night, and communications links were cut in hundreds of places. Several thousand demonstrators were arrested and more than forty people killed. Such incidents continued sporadically through late February.<sup>9</sup>

These tactics had some success. Unable to gain entrance to the North and faced with the opposition to separate elections by most southern leaders, the commission deferred to the UN Interim Assembly. There, in a virtual coup that ran counter to the "nearly unanimous opinion of the members of the Commission," the United States pushed through a resolution calling for "elections in that part of Korea accessible to the (UN) Commission."<sup>10</sup> Thereafter, the UN group confined itself to doing what it could to ensure a free atmosphere for the elections. The elections were held on May 10 amid great tension, with the main responsibility for "processing voters" entrusted to the right-wing

6. Far Eastern Command (hereafter FEC) *Intelligence Summaries* (hereafter *IS*), Jan. 17, 1948, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

7. *IS*, Jan. 30, 1948.

8. See Glenn D. Paige, "Korea," in *Communism and Revolution*, ed. Cyril E. Black and James P. Thornton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 222. Also, Kim Min-ju, ed., *Cheju-do inmin dŭl ŭi 4.3 mujang t'ujaeng sa-charyejip* [Materials on the April 3 armed uprising of the Cheju-do people] (Osaka, 1963), p. 74.

9. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Communist Capabilities in Southern Korea" (ORE-44-48), Oct. 28, 1948, Record Group (hereafter RG) 319, ORE-44-48, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

10. *IS*, Mar. 15, 1948.

Community Protective Associations formed by the American Military Government. Polling places were ringed by members of this group, police, and constabulary men, who searched all voters before allowing them to cast their ballots.<sup>11</sup>

On Cheju-do, at least, all these precautions were needed. On April 3, a popular rebellion broke out as guerrilla units descended from Halla-san, the volcanic peak that dominates the island, and occupied most of the coastal towns. Seoul newspapers speculated that U.S. tactical forces would have to be called in to contend with the "three thousand armed rioters" who controlled most of the island.<sup>12</sup> Voting was disrupted in two of the three electoral districts on Cheju-do where, "during election week, there were fifty assorted demonstrations, disorders, arson cases, and attacks on rightists' offices and houses. Sixty-three towns were attacked, in addition to three government buildings."<sup>13</sup>

Although the official casualty figures were low, many "stories were told of raided villages where there were found the bodies of hanged women and children run through with spears. Tales of villages nearly wiped out kept coming in. Numbers of rightists and police were kidnapped, then hanged or beheaded."<sup>14</sup> Additional police and right-wing youth association members were rushed to the island to restore government control. A U.S. destroyer took up station between Cheju-do and the mainland to prevent guerrilla infiltration, and planes flew over the island in a show of force.

The fighting subsided once the elections were over, but flared up again in the following October and January. Before it ended, the rebellion claimed some 30,000 lives, about 10 percent of the island's population. Throughout the rebellion, the guerrilla forces persisted in the face of extremely adverse circumstances. (This was in marked contrast to the peasant rebellions that occurred on the island at the turn of the century, which tended to melt away at the first show of government force.) Class divisions on the island do not appear to have been as important as the tight clan structure and social solidarity of the islanders in contributing to the rebellion. Many of the leaders of the uprising were returnees from Japan and teachers in the island's schools. The SKLP also had considerable support among the locally recruited constabulary forces stationed on the island. The efforts of

11. *IS*, "Special Edition on the Korean Elections," May 30, 1948.

12. United States Armed Forces in Korea (hereafter USAFIK), *South Korean Interim Government Activities* (Seoul, May 1948), pp. 156-57; and April, p. 179.

13. FEC, "History of USAFIK," pt. 3, p. 18, ms. on file at the U.S. Army Center for Military History, Washington, D.C.

14. *Ibid.*



government troops were hampered by information leaks, assassinations of key officers, defections to the guerrillas, and a poor relationship with police and rightist groups, which made coordinated action impossible. Some Japanese arms were probably available on Cheju-do, which was heavily garrisoned during World War II. The importance of this factor, however, is greatly exaggerated in South Korean accounts. The SKLP probably did not plan the rebellion; more likely it was the result of the island's remoteness, the weakness of government control, and the long-standing grievance against the mainland authorities.<sup>15</sup>

During the second period (summer, 1948) internal violence in Korea subsided markedly. The elections were over and both sides were preoccupied with laying the foundations for the governments to be established in the Soviet and American zones. While the South was embroiled in a constitutional debate in the newly elected National Assembly, the SKLP attempted to carry out an underground election in late July and August to select delegates to the conference that would formally establish the DPRK in early September. With the formation of two rival governments in Korea, each claiming exclusive jurisdiction over the whole peninsula, the process begun by the UN Commission was nearly complete.

The SKLP was busy with three main tasks throughout the summer. The first was a shake-up of the party organization to make it more responsive to central control. Pak Hŏn-yŏng was reported to be greatly dissatisfied with the party's performance in the February resistance campaign. Local cadres were reassigned and a greater centralization imposed on provincial party branches to ensure that future directives would be more effectively implemented.<sup>16</sup> The second goal was the creation of guerrilla "flying columns" in mountain bases to provide the party with the strong military arm that was lacking during the February campaign. The most important task, however, was the August underground elections. Communist claims that elections were held to establish the DPRK in the southern zone as well as in the North have usually been received with extreme skepticism, if not entirely dismissed. Nevertheless, U.S. sources indicate that the SKLP did organize a signature-gathering campaign in the summer of 1948 to select delegates to the conference that established the DPRK. As much as 25 percent of the rural population may have participated in this drive, whether they voted "knowingly" or out of fear.<sup>17</sup>

15. For details see my article, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," *Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 2 (1980), pp. 139-98.

16. *IS*, Sept. 27, 1948; and USAFIK, *Weekly Report*, Sept. 6, 1948, copy in Supreme Command, Allied Powers (SCAP) Adjutant General's File, RG 331, National Archives.

17. Exchange of messages between Department of the Army (Sept. 10, 1948)

As this period drew to a close, a fundamentally different situation emerged. Two hostile governments now faced each other across the parallel. Tensions began to mount along the border as U.S. and Soviet troops turned their positions over to their Korean counterparts. Rumors were rife of an imminent invasion from the North. The presence of occupation forces still prevented direct military conflict, but the Soviets announced that their troops would be withdrawn by the end of the year and the United States began a similar pullback. Another diplomatic round remained to be fought in the General Assembly debate in the fall of 1948, but the lines of the future conflict in Korea were now essentially drawn.

The third period (fall 1948-winter 1948-49) was a time of acute crisis for the ROK government with its very survival at stake. The period opened with the October 19 Yŏsu Rebellion. Two thousand South Korean constabulary troops mutinied as they were about to embark for Cheju-do. The rebellion revealed a widespread Communist penetration in the constabulary, undermining public confidence in the security forces and widening the gulf between the police and the army. The South Korean leadership was poorly equipped to handle the crisis. The cabinet was split by dissension and personal rivalries, and President Rhee, according to one report, was showing signs of "incipient senility." Moreover, there was fear that the United States was about to abandon the South; this anxiety was aggravated by a steady stream of invasion rumors floated by the North. The DPRK's policy toward the South seemed to follow a dual course. On the one hand, it attempted to undercut the legitimacy of the Rhee government by unsettling the domestic situation in the South. On the other, it launched a diplomatic offensive against the ROK with the aid of the Soviet bloc in the fall General Assembly debate.

Renewed fighting on Cheju-do in early October led to the decision to reinforce the constabulary forces operating on the island with the Fourteenth Regiment from Yŏsu. As it was about to embark, the regiment rebelled.<sup>18</sup> The uprising seems to have been prematurely

and General Hodge (Sept. 30, 1948) on the elections in SCAP Adjutant General's File, National Archives.

18. The account of the Yŏsu Rebellion is based on the following sources: Maj. John R. Reed, "The Truth About the Yosus Incident," ms. on file at the U.S. Army Center for Military History, Washington, D.C. Maj. Bernie W. Griffith, Jr. (Ret.), "Pre-War South Korea Questionnaire Response," ms. in answer to the author's inquiries, January, 1979; Capt. James H. Hausman, "History of Rebellion, 14th Constabulary Regiment," interview with a "long-time observer of Korean security affairs," Seoul, Nov. 30, 1977; and the *IS* reports on the incident in the weeks following the rebellion.



precipitated by a special set of local circumstances. The regiment had been reinforced for duty on Cheju-do with light mortars and machine guns drawn from other constabulary units. It also had just been supplied with M-1 carbines but had not yet turned in the Japanese rifles with which it was originally equipped. A statement by the Soldiers' Committee published in the Yösu papers while the city was under rebel control explained that the soldiers "refused to murder the people of Cheju-do [fighting] against imperialist policy." SKLP cells in the regiment and neighboring towns cooperated in staging the rebellion. People's courts were established in Yösu and Sunch'ön, and police and rightists were searched out and executed. The rebels never intended to hold the two towns, and retreated to the nearby Chiri massif to carry on protracted guerrilla warfare. Since two American combat divisions were still stationed in Korea, it seems unlikely that the rebellion sought the immediate overthrow of the Rhee government. Its main goal was to obtain a large supply of arms and set up a guerrilla infrastructure in the Chiri mountains. The absence of immediate support to the guerrillas from the North also suggests that the rebellion was not centrally planned.

The rebellion had immediate and far-reaching consequences. Yösu was a major embarrassment to the ROK in the fall UN debate and produced a tremendous sense of insecurity among the South Koreans. The military situation was touch and go for the first few days after the rebellion. No one was sure whether the revolt was planned and if it would spread to other constabulary regiments. Enough incidents occurred elsewhere to keep alive doubts about their reliability. The Soviet announcement of its troop withdrawal from the North put pressure on the United States to make a similar move. American withdrawals after Yösu slowed down on the entreaties of the Rhee government, but it appeared for a time that the United States might leave the ROK to face its fate alone. A CIA study made shortly after Yösu mirrored this pessimism in its title—"Prospects for the Survival of the ROK." Its conclusion was that the Rhee government would flounder without substantial amounts of American military and economic aid, and that even then its chances were no better than even.<sup>19</sup> Exact casualty figures for Yösu are not available, though South Korean accounts state that about 1,200 civilians and progovernment forces were killed, as against 1,500 rebels and their supporters.<sup>20</sup> Warning

19. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Prospects for the Survival of the Republic of Korea," Oct. 28, 1948, RG 319, ORE 44-48.

20. Dong-a Ilbo, *Siryön kwa yönggwang ŭi minjok-sa* [History of the trials and glories of the nation] (Seoul, 1975).

that Korea had never before in its history had as many traitors, Rhee also pushed a National Security Act through the National Assembly, tightened control of the press, and embarked on a widespread purge of the constabulary in which over a thousand persons were arrested.

The fourth period (spring through summer of 1949) was characterized by an outbreak of large scale fighting along the parallel and the opening of a major guerrilla offensive in the South. The border fighting, which began in the midst of discussions between the ROK and the United States over troop withdrawal, reflected a new assertiveness by the Rhee government towards the North. This so-called "policy of bluff" involved a series of military, diplomatic, and propaganda activities designed to secure an American security commitment, pry loose additional aid, and maintain pressure on the North.<sup>21</sup>

By the spring of 1949, the Rhee government was prey to a mood of self-confidence that verged on bravado. The new ROK had successfully weathered the difficult challenges that faced it in its first months. The Yösu Rebellion had been suppressed. On Cheju-do, an all-out pacification drive begun in February had prepared the island for Rhee's April visit. Accompanied by a large entourage of foreign and domestic reporters, Rhee scored a "public relations home run" on his swing through the troubled southern provinces.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the South had been successful in winning widespread recognition among the Western powers after the fall UN debate. Most likely, the southern leaders felt that they had been too long on the receiving end of Communist attacks and that they were now in a position to return the fire. There were several aspects to this much more active southern policy.

For one thing, Rhee and his ministers made repeated public calls for a march north. All that held Rhee back was the knowledge that this would result in a break with the United States, and the South's lack of sufficient offensive weapons (especially an air force). To attract more American military aid, the Ministry of Education mobilized tens of thousands of students to participate in "give us arms" demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy in Seoul. A parallel effort in Washington involved lobbying congressmen and Defense Department officials.

A diplomatic offensive was also begun as Rhee threw his support behind a Philippine initiative for a Pacific pact. Modeled on NATO,

21. Yi Ho-jac, *Han'guk oegyo chöngch'aek ŭi isang kwa hyönsil: Yi Söngman oegyo wa miguk* [The ideal and reality of Korean diplomatic policy: Syngman Rhee's diplomacy and America (1945-1953)] (Seoul, 1975).

22. Roberts to Wedemeyer, May 2, 1949, in U.S. Department of the Army, G-3 Plans and Operations Files (hereafter P & O Files), National Archives.



the goal of the proposal was to draw a reluctant United States into a more definite commitment to the security of its allies in Asia. Discussions progressed to the point of a visit by Chiang K'ai-shek to Chinhae in August for a conference with Rhee. Although Chiang offered fighter squadrons in return for Korean bases to bomb the mainland, Rhee wisely balked at becoming involved in the Chinese civil war. The release of the U.S. White Papers on China on the final day of the conference killed any chances of agreement with the Nationalists. Ultimately, the proposal for a Pacific pact turned out to be a major embarrassment that further isolated the ROK when it was excluded, along with the Nationalists, from the Baguio Conference early in 1950.

But more was involved than threats, lobbying, and diplomacy. Serious fighting also broke out for the first time along the parallel. Three points should be made. First, unlike previous incidents, these were not spontaneous outbursts. Some were undoubtedly started on the initiative of local commanders, particularly on the southern side; General Roberts feared that these "boy scout tactics" might provoke a major conflagration. Not much seems to have been done, however, by the Rhee government to control these commanders. In at least some cases, they were acting on the direct orders of political leaders, not on their own. The North exercised much tighter control over its forces along the parallel. While the DPRK started its share of incidents, these were limited engagements designed to drive home political points. The North had a relatively restrained posture, concentrating on the build-up of a "revolutionary base" in the North and supporting a limited guerrilla offensive in the South. A second point about the border incidents is that they were closely related to political events: the withdrawal of American occupation forces, the formation of a Democratic Front for the Unification of the Fatherland (DFUF), the visit of Chiang K'ai-shek, and a propaganda campaign against "South Korean border provocations." Finally, a close examination of the pattern of these incidents reveals a complex sequence of actions and reactions as each side adjusted and responded to the moves of the other. Since only fragmentary newspaper accounts of these battles have been available in English, it is necessary to examine them in some detail here.

The fighting started in early May 1949 when ROK forces began a "general consolidation of the parallel" in the midst of discussions with the United States over troop withdrawal. The first incident occurred near Kaesŏng on May 4 when North Korean border guards pushed South Korean troops from newly occupied positions straddling the parallel, touching off four days of heavy fighting that eventually involved battalion-sized units. On May 5, elements of two ROK bat-

allions, in the most serious instance of disaffection in the security forces since Yŏsu, defected to the North in the Ch'unch'ŏn area. Unsettled by these incidents, Rhee went public with his doubts on troop withdrawal, demanding that the United States "sit down immediately and state its policies and plans in respect to the immediate future of Korea." In an attempt to offset the effects of the defections, the South Korean media played up the deaths of "ten brave soldiers" killed in a suicide charge on the North Korean positions during the Kaesŏng fighting. The heroism of the "ten human bombs" received so much publicity, in fact, that the phrase entered the language in the South. ROK forces also attempted to ambush North Korean border guards in the Ŭijŏngbu area on May 7 by baiting them with a staged defection. During the course of this unsuccessful operation, South Korean units penetrated "four kilometers into the North and shot up several villages."

The North responded on May 18 with an attack by several companies of border guards in the Paekch'ŏn area that carried almost ten kilometers south of the parallel before it was repulsed by South Korean reinforcements rushed to the scene. A more serious incident occurred three days later when a series of minor clashes escalated into a major attack by two North Korean battalions in the Turak mountain area on the Ongjin peninsula. The South poured reinforcements into the peninsula by landing ships from Inch'ŏn, rapidly expanding its forces from a few companies at the onset of the fighting to more than eight battalions by early June. Despite this massive build-up, adverse terrain and North Korean superiority in artillery made it difficult to dislodge the DPRK forces from their five-kilometer deep salient. During the course of the fighting, a South Korean guerrilla unit attacked T'aet'an, some ten kilometers north of the parallel, in an attempt to put pressure on the rear of the northern forces. The ROK forces finally succeeded in retaking most of their positions and occupying Ŭnp'a-san, a mountain several hundred meters north of the border dominating the approaches to the North Korean city of Haeju. By the end of June, the situation on the peninsula had stabilized. About half the southern force was withdrawn, and the chief of staff of the ROK Army guided members of the UN Commission and reporters on a tour of the area, declaring that the South had "recovered the initiative on all fronts."

Serious fighting continued through June and July in numerous small unit engagements. In June, a company of South Korean guerrillas from the Ho-rim (Forest Tiger) unit was captured while on a deep penetration raid into the North. According to American sources commenting on northern propaganda on their trial in P'yŏngyang in September, ROK guerrilla units had previously been reported attacking



targets as far north as the outskirts of Wŏnsan on the east coast, although the exact extent of their operations was unknown. In July, elements of an ROK battalion were also beaten back in an attack on a guerrilla base at Yangyang, just across the parallel. The minister of national defense may have been referring to the ROK's ability to stage successful incursions on the east coast when he told reporters on July 17 that the army was "awaiting an order from President Rhee and [was] confident of completely occupying Yangyang or Wŏnsan in a day."

Heavy fighting flared up again in August as clashes involving battalion-sized units broke out at Ongjin, Kaesŏng, and Ch'unch'ŏn. The incidents began on July 25 when a South Korean battalion attacked a northern observation post on Hill 488, a few hundred meters north of the parallel, overlooking Kaesŏng. The position changed hands twice over the next few days. Kaesŏng itself was shelled in a fierce artillery duel between the two sides that lasted a week. The incident was significant since it demonstrated an overwhelming northern superiority in artillery, and marked the first major involvement by the North Korean army in support of the border guards. Another battle broke out on Ongjin on August 4, causing a brief panic among the southern forces in which an order was nearly given to evacuate the whole peninsula. A third incident began two days later when North Korean forces occupied several strategic hills along the parallel near Ch'unch'ŏn. Two weeks of heavy fighting followed before ROK troops retook the heights in a regimental assault supported by artillery. General Roberts, the head of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), described these August clashes as follows:

Each was in our opinion brought on by the presence of a small South Korean salient north of the parallel. Each was characterized by the CO's screaming "invasion, reinforce, ammo!" . . . The South Koreans wish to invade the North. We tell them that if such occurs, all advisors will pull out and the ECA spigot will be turned off. In case they'd lost the Ongjin peninsula, they felt they'd have to invade to Chŏrwon about twenty miles in, in order to save face. . . . Most incidents on the parallel are due to needling by opposing local forces. Both North and South are at fault. No attacks by the North have ever been in serious proportions.<sup>23</sup>

These Kaesŏng battles appear to have been designed by the South to exploit the attention focused on Korea by the upcoming visit of Chiang K'ai-shek to discuss a Pacific pact. The Ongjin and Ch'unch'ŏn incidents may have been Northern attempts to embarrass the ROK during the Chinese leader's visit.

23. Roberts to Boltz, in "Personal Comments on KMAG and Korean Affairs," Aug. 19, 1949, in P & O Files, National Archives.

There was no ambiguity about the causes of several serious naval engagements that also took place during this month. South Korean intelligence personnel disguised as fishermen sailed from Inch'ŏn early in August to raid North Korean coastal shipping. ROK vessels also shelled shore installations near the mouth of the Taedong River on August 11. The most serious incident occurred six days later when a ROK task force of six mine sweepers attacked the military harbor of Monggump'o, capturing one North Korean ship and sinking four. The naval chain of command was bypassed in this attack with the commander of the ROK ships, Lee Yong-woon, acting on the direct orders of the minister of national defense, an ex-navy man. After the incident, Lee was quickly reassigned by his patrons to an obscure port command to get him out of harm's way as Ambassador Muccio and KMAG advisers clamored for disciplinary action.<sup>24</sup> Although American advisers seem to have been kept in the dark, learning about these actions only after the fact, port calls by U.S. warships over the summer and ROK-initiated discussions concerning basing agreements may have contributed to the South Korean naval offensive.

The parallel remained relatively quiet after this until mid-October. In the midst of a North Korean campaign against ROK border provocations, two battalions of the DPRK's forces pushed southern troops from the positions they still held on Ŭnp'a-san on the northern side of the parallel. Concerned about the continuing fighting on Ongjin, where ROK forces would be trapped if war broke out, KMAG pressured the South Korean military to pull back from the exposed peninsula. ROK strength was further reduced to two battalions and Colonel Paek In-yŏp was assigned as the new commander with orders to keep things quiet. Despite these instructions, Paek staged a surprise attack in mid-December on the North Korean positions to "increase morale." Briefly retaking Ŭnp'a-san, Paek brought the northern forces into a hasty counter-attack in which one of their battalions was badly mauled in a ROK ambush. After this, the Ongjin peninsula, and the border in general, was quiet until just before the war.

24. This account of the border clashes is based upon the following sources: Committee for the Compilation of War History, *Han'guk chŏnjaeng-sa I, Haebang kwa kŏn'gun* [History of the Korean War, vol. 1: The liberation and the establishment of the army] (Seoul, 1967), pp. 506-37; Sasaki Harutaka, *Han'gukchŏn-bisa, sang-gwon: kŏn'gun kwa siryŏn* [Secret history of the Korean War, vol. 1: The establishment of the army and its trials] (Seoul: Pyŏnghaksa, 1977), pp. 417-62; and U.S. Military Attache (USMILAT), and IS reports for the period. Interestingly, the second edition of *Han'guk chŏnjaeng-sa* omits all reference to the border clashes since they were regarded as being "too political." Interview with Yi Hyŏng sŏk, chairman of the Committee for the Compilation of War History, Seoul, 1978.



While these border incidents clearly marked a major escalation in the confrontation between the South and the North, it is difficult to gauge their seriousness. General Roberts believed that the clashes were deliberately exaggerated by the South to obtain more aid and "a general rule of thumb" was to discount casualty figures by a factor of ten. KMAC estimates, on the other hand, were biased in the opposite direction and tended to downplay the seriousness of the military situation in Korea. The size of the units involved and the weapons employed suggest that some of those border engagements were major battles. Reliable casualty figures are not available, but they must have been heavy. Intelligence reports mentioned North Korean trains crowded with wounded after some engagements and a KMAC observer reported seeing South Korean dead "stacked in a tent like cordwood" during one phase of the Ongjin fighting.

It is apparent that both sides initiated some engagements and that neither considered the parallel an international boundary. The North seems to have gotten the worst of it in the actual fighting. The reason for this was that it garrisoned its border with a lightly armed police force under the ministry of the interior, like most Communist states, while holding its main forces in reserve. The South was often able, therefore, to achieve local superiority in the initial stages of an engagement before the North could bring its army into play. But the fighting was a costly diversion for the South. It reduced the readiness of ROK forces by cutting down on training and using up scarce supplies. Suspicion of Rhee's motives among American policy makers growing out of these incidents also contributed, along with economic constraints and consideration of responsibilities elsewhere, to the decision to limit military aid to "defensive weapons." The border incidents, moreover, made it more difficult to read the DPRK's intentions. The gradual deployment of North Korean forces toward the parallel that began in the fall could easily be interpreted as a defensive reaction. The North was clearly worried by the border fighting: rumors of an invasion from the South began to be heard in the North for the first time as the DPRK began a major campaign against southern "border provocations."

One conclusion follows from these border incidents. Although one of the best arguments against the Gupta thesis that the war began with a small South Korean incursion at Haeju is the relatively restrained response of the North to the incidents during the earlier period, the cumulative effect of these incidents may well have been to create an image among the northern leadership of a long-term threat from the South. Therefore this may have lent a certain preemptive quality to the June 1950 attack.

At any rate, North Korean and Soviet policy underwent a decisive

shift early in this period. By the spring of 1949, the DPRK had abandoned any hopes it might have had of gaining support for its position in the United Nations. The North suffered a major diplomatic setback when the General Assembly adopted a U.S. resolution recognizing the ROK as the only legitimate government on the peninsula. Pak Ilŏn-yŏng, the DPRK's foreign minister, announced soon after that the North would henceforth "rely on its own resources" to unify the country. Soviet policy also changed. In March 1949, Kim Il-sung and Pak headed a high-level North Korean delegation that traveled to Moscow for negotiations with the Soviet leadership. The trip resulted in cultural and economic treaties as well as a secret military aid agreement. It is apparently to these meetings that Khrushchev refers in his memoirs, when he recalls how Kim pushed for an attack that would touch off a domestic uprising in the South. That something unusual was afoot seemed to be indicated by the failure to sign a mutual security treaty. Observers surmised that this departure from normal practice might indicate a Soviet unwillingness to become involved if a conflict flared up in Korea. It is doubtful, however, that a decision to attack the South was reached at this point. Stalin had a reputation for extreme caution in his foreign policy initiatives, and was unlikely to commit himself irrevocably to such a course of action so far in advance. The initial Soviet arms deliveries were limited, probably not greatly exceeding the standard satellite level and certainly not bringing the North Korean forces up to the strength of the Soviet occupation troops formerly in the country. That the Soviets were not munificent in their initial aid to the DPRK is also suggested by the formation of a Military Sponsorship Committee in July to solicit contributions to purchase arms. The main build-up of the North Korean forces did not occur until the fall, and arms were still arriving in the spring of 1950 when war broke out. The main thrust of North Korean policy was a renewed emphasis on armed guerrilla struggle in the South.

The major unification initiative on the northern side during this period was the formation of the DFUF on June 25 in response to an appeal by leftist groups in the South for a united front against the Rhee government. Despite its name, the formation of the front reflected the intensified suppression of leftists in the ROK, which made open political action in concert with opponents of Rhee impossible. Still, the president was taking no chances. The day after the establishment of the DFUF, his chief opponent on the Right, Kim Ku, who had been in touch with the North in an attempt to form a Peaceful Unification Conference, was assassinated. The DFUF was also an attempt to capitalize on the pull-out of the last American combat troops (five hundred KMAC advisers remained behind) in June. The



main proposal to come out of the inaugural meeting of the DFUF was a call for elections in the North and South to form an all-Korea legislative body by September.

Along with the formation of the DFUF, the SKLP opened a large-scale guerrilla offensive in the South. Aided by the diversion of ROK forces to the parallel clashes, the remnants of the Chiri-san guerrillas succeeded in regrouping and breaking out of the remote mountainous areas to which they had been confined over the winter by the pressure of ROK operations. In a "surge of activity," the guerrillas began to expand their base areas "and increase their hit-and-run attacks on villages, police boxes, police stations, and small government installations, such as power stations. Roadblocks were established in remote areas and other transportation was harassed. Atrocities became common practice . . . by late spring or early summer of 1949, these guerrilla bands had become a real problem."<sup>25</sup>

The North supported the offensive by infiltrating several guerrilla units trained at the Kangdong Political Institute into the South. A second base area was established in the Odac mountain area, just below the parallel on the east coast, with the dispatch of some six hundred guerrillas in June and July. The revival of the insurgent movement was reflected in a shift in casualty figures, which began to tilt in the guerrillas' favor. The police also began to pull back from isolated outposts, and formed special units to guard railroad and other communications links. By midsummer, guerrilla bands were "attacking at will" in many areas of the South.

A more serious wave of attacks came in early August as the SKLP attempted to implement the call for all-Korea elections in September. A captured directive urged the guerrillas to make an all-out effort, stating that "the final reckoning was at hand." The offensive was supported by two more infiltrations of guerrillas on the east coast. Three hundred guerrillas, commanded by Kim Tal-sam, the leader of the Cheju-do rebellion who had fled to the North, penetrated into the Andong area in early August to establish a third base area. Three hundred and sixty guerrillas infiltrated into the T'aebaek mountains under Yi Ho-je in five separate groups a month later. With these new infiltrations, the guerrilla movement reached a peak strength of some three thousand men, with three to five times as many supporters in the base areas. Why the September elections were never held remains something of a puzzle. While some accounts have speculated that the

25. USMILAT, *Weekly Report*, Sept. 24, 1949; and the captured North Korean newfilm of the trial, "Ho Rim Army Group Trials, Oct. 1949," MID 5402, RG 242, National Archives.

SKLP may have been encouraged by Kim Il-sung to exhaust its strength in futile attacks to undercut the position of Pak Hŏn-yŏng, or was forced to call off a planned attack under Soviet pressure, neither explanation seems convincing. The most likely explanation is that the guerrillas were unable to demonstrate enough strength to make a northern initiative possible. Although the guerrilla groups were apparently in contact with the North by radio, they were isolated from each other and unable to effectively coordinate operations. The guerrillas, all of whom were originally from the South, received almost no support from the North after their infiltration and had to rely on a greatly weakened SKLP organization. When it became clear that the offensive was not achieving its objectives, Radio P'yŏngyang simply dropped all mention of the elections.

Guerrilla activity also fell off in mid-September, but picked up again early the next month. Responding to calls for a "winter offensive," the guerrillas shifted tactics to large-scale attacks on towns. On October 2, Kim Tal-sam's unit launched coordinated assaults on the police station, prison, and army barracks at Andong. Later in the month, on October 27, several hundred Chiri-san guerrillas mounted an attack on Chinju, the base of the newly formed ROK Marine Corps. Guerrilla units on the east coast also began to consolidate their forces. The badly mauled remnants of Yi Ho-je's guerrilla unit joined up with Kim Tal-sam's group in the P'ohang area, when they were reinforced on November 6 by one hundred men infiltrated by sea. Despite the continuing play given by radio P'yŏngyang to their activity, it was apparent that the North was losing touch with the guerrillas. The truth was that the guerrillas were falling back as an ROK counter-offensive, launched in October, gathered momentum.

During the fifth period (winter of 1949-50), most of the fighting shifted to the interior of the ROK. To deal with the revival of guerrilla activity, the South Korean government launched a major offensive against the guerrillas that succeeded over the winter in breaking the back of the insurgent movement. The substantial SKLP party organization also came under increasing attack by ROK security agencies utilizing the National Guidance Alliance, a network of former Communist informants. But if the internal situation in the ROK was improving, its international position seemed to be increasingly in question. Doubts about the American security commitment were raised early in the new year by Secretary of State Acheson's speech excluding the ROK from the U.S. defense perimeter in Asia and the vote of the House of Representatives to cut off Korean aid. The military balance on the peninsula, meanwhile, was tilting sharply in the DPRK's favor as large quantities of Soviet aid arrived and Korean veterans of the Chinese Communist forces returned to the North.



The South Korean offensive against the guerrillas began in early September and continued throughout the winter. Several hundred separate counter guerrilla operations were conducted by the ROK army and police, some of them involving several battalions of troops. The offensive was designed to break the hold of the guerrillas on the countryside by employing a classic strategy of area clearance. The first step was to blockade the base areas by setting up check points, roadblocks, and a coast watcher system to prevent the guerrillas from moving freely and to stop reinforcements from reaching them. In the second stage, the rural population in areas of guerrilla activity was relocated by the police to villages under government control, thus depriving the insurgents of food, shelter, and manpower. Along the western margins of the Chiri mountains alone, more than ninety thousand persons were moved out of villages exposed to guerrilla attacks. Village guard forces were established to watch fields at night, man roadblocks, and assist in operations against the guerrillas. The evacuated areas were considered "free fire zones" in which anyone remaining behind was assumed to be associated with the guerrillas. During the final phases of the operations, government forces conducted sweeps of the isolated base areas one by one. The increasingly desperate situation of the guerrillas was reflected in their changing pattern of activity as the winter continued. Avoiding contact with the ROK forces whenever possible, the guerrilla units began to conduct foraging raids over wider areas to secure food and supplies. Winter operations in the South Korean mountains were extremely difficult, even for the government task forces, with many deaths from exposure.

The military operations were coupled with highly effective measures to undercut popular support for the guerrillas. An amnesty program begun in late October, lasting five weeks, succeeded in inducing over forty thousand defections. The activities of the 200,000-member National Guidance Alliance also helped to uncover SKLP sympathizers and assisted the police in maintaining surveillance of former Communists. The stepped-up pressure began to pay off in late March when Kim Sam-nyong and Yi Chu-ha, the two top-ranking leaders of the party remaining in the South, were arrested in Seoul. Their prominence is suggested by the DPRK's proposal to exchange them for Cho Man-sik, a nationalist purged by the Soviets in 1946 for refusing to go along with trusteeship. The swap fell through because of suspicions of both sides. In fact, the SKLP organization was beginning to crumble. Even though CIA reports and Khrushchev's memoirs agree in placing the SKLP's strength at half a million members, widespread arrests had badly disrupted its communications and seemed to render it incapable of taking coordinated action.

Things were not going so well, however, for the Rhee government in its relations with the United States. As mentioned, in a still controversial speech delivered to the National Press Club on January 12, the U.S. Secretary of State Acheson seemed to exclude the ROK from the American defense perimeter in Asia. The speech seemed to represent a new departure in policy, and its delivery by an authoritative spokesman to an audience of news editors gave it much greater prominence than any previous statement on the subject. For some weeks afterwards, Rhee made a habit of buttonholing every American that he encountered to lecture him on the inconstancy of U.S. policy with the aid of a pocket map with Acheson's defense perimeter outlined in red ink.<sup>26</sup> According to a former North Korean journalist, Kim Il-sung was also "much excited" when informed of wire service reports of Acheson's remarks.<sup>27</sup> The rejection of the Korean aid bill by the House of Representatives a week later, though subsequently reversed, only compounded the adverse impact of the speech. Serious tensions were also developing in the Korean-American relationship over Rhee's drift towards authoritarianism and his casual handling of economic problems. Rhee was seen by many Americans as a "little Chiang K'ai-shek" whose government was likely to go the same way as the Kuomintang in China. Increasing strains in the relationship culminated in an aide-mémoire on April 25 threatening a cut-off in assistance if National Assembly elections were not held on schedule and if steps were not taken to curb inflationary pressures on the ROK economy.

At the same time the DPRK's conventional military capabilities were rapidly expanding. In addition to the flow of arms from the Soviet Union, the DPRK's forces were augmented by the return of Korean veterans who had served with the Chinese Communists. The victory of the People's Liberation Army over the Nationalists in the fall of 1949 made possible the repatriation of as many as forty thousand of these troops to the DPRK. These experienced and ideologically committed volunteers were incorporated as units into the North Korean army in a major addition to the DPRK's military strength. There were several signs, moreover, that DPRK policy was in a state of flux. The North apparently began to reassess its strategy toward the South at a three-day meeting attended by several members of the SKLP faction in P'yŏngyang at the end of the year. A North Korean delegation headed by Kim Tu-bong also reportedly attended an "Asiatic

26. Interview with a "long-time observer of Korean security affairs," Seoul, Nov. 30, 1977.

27. According to the story of Han Chae-dŏk, now deceased, as recounted in interviews with Yi Chong-hak, Seoul, July 28, 1978 and James Lee, Seoul, June 16, 1978.



defense discussion" held in Moscow in late December. Future courses of action in Korea may have been discussed, moreover, during Mao's visit to the Soviet Union early in the year, although there is no definite evidence one way or the other on this point.

The sixth period (spring 1950) was characterized by an artificially quiet military situation and a series of fast-breaking political developments. Guerrilla activity and border clashes fell off dramatically in the months before the war. The only border fighting occurred when the remnants of the east coast guerrillas attempted to exfiltrate to the North in early March. Two heavily armed units of over six hundred men assigned to escort them were almost completely wiped out by ROK forces. The political atmosphere in the South also heated up during this period with opposition proposals for a constitutional amendment leading to a cabinet-dominant system, disputes between the legislature and Rhee over the budget and scheduling of elections, and the May 30 National Assembly elections. Radio P'yŏngyang made increasingly strident attacks stating that Korea was at a crossroads and only through the overthrow of Rhee could the country be saved.

In late March, the guerrilla units that had been sent South over the previous summer attempted to make their way back to the North. Much reduced in size, the guerrilla bands came under heavy pressure as they tried to reach the parallel. On March 24 and 26, two groups of about three hundred members each were sent to guide the remnants of the guerrillas to the North. The relief columns were unable to carry out their mission and were almost totally wiped out by the ROK Army. The exfiltration of these east coast guerrillas, who would have been ideally placed to support a North Korean attack, suggests to some that the decision to invade the South was made after this point.

The National Assembly elections were finally held on May 30 after strong representations by the United States. While the election results represented a setback for Rhee, their importance in the timing of the North Korean attack has been greatly exaggerated. The composition of the new legislature was still not clear on the eve of the war. While the main winners were independent candidates who had sat out the 1948 balloting, this was not necessarily a defeat for Rhee. Rhee himself had encouraged independents to run, realizing the weakness of his own organization and the lack of a leader of comparable stature around whom opponents could rally. The main conservative opposition group, in fact, had lost even a greater percentage of its seats than had supporters of the president. Moderate and progressive candidates had captured about a quarter of the seats. What the election results seemed to show was the existence of considerable latent dissatisfaction with the government and greater willingness to explore

an accommodation with the North. But Rhee had been in tight spots before, and still had ample resources to bring the new assembly into line.

The North made two unification proposals in the weeks before the war. The first proposal was made by the DFUF on June 7 as a counter to the South Korean elections. It called for new all-Korea elections to choose representatives to a unification conference to be held either in Haeju or Kaesŏng, the goal being to unify the country by August 15, the fifth anniversary of liberation. The second unification initiative calling for the merger of the two Korean legislatures into a single body was made by the Supreme People's Assembly on June 19. The initiative probably represented an attempt to feel out the opinion of the new assembly, whose members might be more receptive to a scheme that did not call for a new round of elections.

The final decision to attack was apparently made sometime in April or May. Three days after the first unification proposals were made, a hundred heavily armed guerrillas were infiltrated into the South with orders to split up and contact provincial SKLP committees to organize uprisings when war broke out. There is no mention of an attack in captured Central Committee and cabinet documents dated early in the year. That the decision to intervene in the South came suddenly does not necessarily mean that the North "jumped the gun" on an invasion scheduled for later in the year.<sup>28</sup> The same factors determining DPRK policy (one step removed, with somewhat different weight, and combined with considerations of global strategy) would also have influenced a Soviet decision. Even if the exact moment of the attack could not be foreseen, the Korean crisis had been building toward an explosion for several years. Little was required to set it off.

#### TOWARD A MODEL OF THE NORTH KOREAN INTERVENTION

In light of the widespread violence in the South before the war, it is useful to look at the North Korean attack as a case of intervention in a situation of civil strife. No claim is made for the exclusiveness of this approach, but it does seem able to bring out aspects of the war that are obscured in other accounts. Admittedly, the divided-country context makes Korea an extreme case. But the theoretical issues involved may stand out with greater clarity for just that reason, and Korea, after all, may not be so different from other third world countries where arbitrarily drawn borders cut across ethnic, racial, and

28. Robert R. Simmons, *The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow and the Politics of the Korean Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1975); Wilbur Hitchcock, "North Korea Jumps the Gun," *Current History* (March 1951)



religious groups. Looking at the war from this perspective can also facilitate comparison with similar interventions by lesser powers elsewhere. These have become increasingly common in recent years and Korea seems to have been one of the first. The most important reason for looking at the war in this way, though, is that it may help resolve several issues in the literature: Was the war primarily civil or international in character? Was the DPRK acting as a proxy for the Soviet Union, or is Korean nationalism the key to understanding the attack? How important was the group centered on Pak Hŏn-yŏng in the North Korean decision? Were the border clashes in the summer of 1948 a factor in the North Korean decision? What determined the timing of the attack?

A starting point in answering these questions is the framework of four variables proposed by C. R. Mitchell for the comparative study of interventions.<sup>29</sup> The factors, which would seem to apply to any dyadic relationship, are: (1) the progress of the guerrilla struggle in the disrupted state; (2) the linkages between it and the potential intervening state; (3) the structure of the latter's decision-making process; and (4) how conducive the international environment is to intervention. Mitchell suggests that all four factors are systemically related in determining the "threshold of violence" at which intervention is likely to occur. That is, neither "civil war" nor "unprovoked aggression" is likely to prove helpful, by itself, in understanding intervention in general, or the North Korean attack in particular.

As for the first factor, the most important conclusion to be drawn is that the war came at a time when the guerrilla movement in the South had been virtually destroyed. The SKLP organization was also crumbling under successive waves of arrests and was a rapidly wasting asset for the DPRK. North Korean hopes of achieving unification

29. C. R. Mitchell, "Civil War and the Involvement of External Parties," *International Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 2: 166-94. The venturesome reader is also referred to C.A. Insard and E.C. Zeeman, "Some Models from Catastrophe Theory in the Social Sciences," reprint from *The Use of Models in the Social Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1976); Zeeman et al., "A Model for Institutional Disturbances," *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology* 29, no. 1: 66-80; and Rodney G. Tomlinson, "The Application of Catastrophe Theory to International Events Flows," paper presented at International Studies Association meeting, March 1977. I have been working with Professors John Deiner (political science) and Stanley Samsky (mathematics) at the University of Delaware to see if similar models may be developed for interventions by "outside parties" in situations of civil strife. The FEC data on internal warfare events in Korea have been coded (by type of incident, date, location, initiator, weapons used, forces involved, and casualties) for some 1,800 incidents. The analysis, however, has only begun and results are not yet available.

through a united front with opponents of Rhee, through the Soviet initiative for simultaneous troop withdrawal, and through armed guerrilla struggle had been successively dashed. The only weapon remaining was its conventional military force, which held an overwhelming advantage over the South. So long as the guerrilla movement seemed to have a chance of success, the DPRK held back from exercising this option, exhibiting some restraint in the border clashes over the summer of 1949. But by the spring of 1950, a conventional military attack was the only alternative left.

With regard to the second factor, it is possible to distinguish several types of linkage operating in the Korean case. The most important of these was the pull of Korean nationalism. The country had been liberated from thirty-six years of Japanese colonial rule only to find itself divided into two hostile states. All political groups considered unification to be an immediate and pressing goal. The strength of this commitment was strong enough to induce many non-Communist political leaders in the South, at some personal risk, to boycott the 1948 elections, and to come to the P'yŏngyang Conference instead. A more volatile linkage was the interaction of the two Koreas along the parallel. An obvious counterpoint to the North's view of the potential of the guerrilla movement was its perception of the threat from the South. The border clashes in the summer of 1949 left no doubt about the bellicose stance of the Rhee government. North Korean pique over these incidents and nervousness concerning southern intentions was evident during a campaign in the early fall focused on "border provocations." The Rhee government's future course of action as it increased its military capabilities, moreover, must have been clear to the North. There was also a "penetrative" linkage between the two halves of the country based on a partially overlapping leadership. Members of the SKLP faction involved with Pak Hŏn-yŏng continued to direct guerrilla operations in the South while holding positions in the North Korean party and state structure.

The third set of variables, the decision-making characteristics of the intervening state, is a difficult subject to research. Little information is presently available on the day-to-day operation of the North Korean political system, and decision-making approaches demand large amounts of inside information that must be analyzed anew for every policy shift. There is also the thorny question of the degree of autonomy of the North Korean leadership. Probably, neither the "puppet" nor "independent actor" model wholly applies. Instead the relationship was most likely characterized by a broad middle range of influence and consultation.

We do know that there was a factional debate within the North Korean leadership over the proper strategy to pursue toward the



South. This suggests that the DPRK had some independence in formulating policy. The outlines of this debate are far from clear, but most speculation centers on the role of Pak Hŏn-yŏng. There seem to be three main views.<sup>30</sup> Kim Chum-kon, Kim Ch'ang-sun, and the Japanese "Neighboring Countries Research Institute" maintain that Pak advocated a two-pronged strategy of keeping up pressure on the South through the guerrillas, and seizing border areas to discredit Rhee and force the ROK into political negotiations. The position of Kim Nam-sik is that Pak pushed for the war, assuring the DPRK leadership and the Soviets that the SKLP would rise up to support a North Korean attack. The third opinion, held by Pak Kap-dong and Kim Sam-kyu, is that Pak opposed the war as "leftist adventurism," saw the role of the guerrillas as keeping the South tied down so as to prevent an attack on the DPRK, and continued to advocate united front tactics.

Caution is necessary in sorting through these differing interpretations. Although most of the accounts assume that factional positions remained constant over time, it seems reasonable to expect that they would change in response to a developing situation. The first view of Pak's role is particularly open to criticism since U.S. intelligence reports indicate that this position had jelled as early as February 1949. It also seems, at least on the surface, to be somewhat self-serving to place responsibility for the border incidents solely on the North. The main objection to the third account, which seems to be a minority opinion, is that it appears to contradict what is known about Pak's character. The problem with Kim Nam-sik's view, which otherwise seems the most plausible, is that there is considerable evidence to indicate that the North was well aware of the desperate plight of the SKLP. It may be, however, that the DPRK leadership felt that the only way to galvanize the remaining SKLP organization into action was through a military thrust across the parallel. Kim Nam-sik's views of Pak's role are supported to some extent by the accusations leveled against the SKLP leader when he was purged after the war. The gravamen of the charges against him was that he had "engaged in circulating false reports" that misled the DPRK about the strength of the Communist movement in the South. What is most interesting about this charge is its implication that the North indeed started the war. In evaluating the importance of factionalism in the origins of the war,

30. Kim Chum-kon, *The Korean War* (Seoul: Kwangmyŏng Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 197-211; Sasaki, *Han'gukchŏn-bisa*, pp. 470-74; *Han'guk chŏnjaeng-sa*, pp. 503-5; interviews with Kim Nam-sik, May 22, 23, and June 1, 1978; *IS* and *USMILAT* reports for the period.

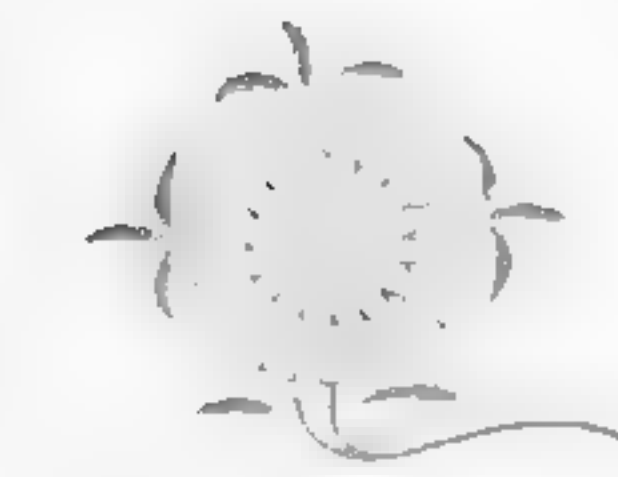
it is necessary to keep in mind that it was only one of the factors bearing on the decision to intervene. Its importance has probably been overblown in some accounts. In general, its effect seems to have been to bias North Korean decision making toward a somewhat more active policy vis-à-vis the South.

The final factor influencing the threshold of violence at which intervention will occur is the conduciveness of the international environment. International factors were obviously very important in the Korean case. The initial division of the peninsula owed to outside interference. The superpowers sponsored the establishment of rival governments in their respective occupation zones, and lent the two Koreas political, economic, and military support. At the same time, as Okonogi Masao points out, their continuing presence led to a kind of "stabilization by deterrence," which temporarily froze the inherently unstable situation they had created on the peninsula. With the disengagement of the two superpowers, however, the status quo began to come unstuck as the confrontation between the North and South escalated in its intensity and directness. The situation had developed by the spring of 1950 to a point where a major conflict was virtually inevitable. In addition to this "built-in" pattern of outside interference, support, and disengagement, sudden changes in the international environment in the winter and spring before the war produced a situation that was extremely permissive of North Korean action. The victory of the Chinese Communist movement, the Soviet explosion of the atomic bomb, and the increasing tensions in the Korean-American relationship all worked to remove the barriers to North Korean action. Several possible combinations of domestic and international events may have triggered the North Korean attack. But there is little point in speculating on these precipitating events without also considering the mix of factors that, over a period of years, had built the situation in Korea to the point of an explosion.

In this paper, I have attempted to sketch the pattern of political violence in Korea before the war and to outline the complex interaction of local and international factors influencing it. Looked at against this background, the Korean war appears as merely the last and most serious escalation in the increasingly violent confrontation between the two halves of the divided country. After the establishment of separate regimes and the pull-out of occupation forces, it was only a matter of time before a major conflict broke out. Both sides were deeply committed to unification and tried their best, with the instruments available to them, to achieve it on their own terms. The North's



decision to resort to conventional warfare came only after other policy options had been tried and had failed. Far from being crazy or irrational, northern behavior seems to have been closely keyed to developing events on the peninsula and the situation it found itself confronted with by the spring of 1950.



## Commentary

JON HALLIDAY

JOHN MERRILL IS TO BE COMPLIMENTED ON HIS EXCELLENT PAPER. IT NOT ONLY introduces important new material, but also handles the evidence with scrupulous fairness. His contribution destroys numerous stereotypes about the background of the Korean War and helps set it in its correct context. My comments are limited to a few key points.

1. Merrill opts for a methodology based on work by Charles McClelland that, he says, "has the advantage of bypassing the thorny problem of trying to determine the real motives of statesmen where sufficient information is unavailable." Later, he introduces a model developed by C. R. Mitchell to determine "the threshold of violence at which intervention is likely to occur."

Neither McClelland nor Mitchell contributes anything substantial to Merrill's discussion, which, in my opinion, would be strengthened by eliminating reference to them. McClelland's approach is weak *because* it does not address the necessity of examining as thoroughly as possible, and however sketchy the information, why a people, or a political movement, or a state do fight. Neither the guerrilla war in Korea prior to June 1950, nor the Korean War itself—any less than say, the Vietnam War—can be understood without tackling the question of why the people were fighting. Merrill posits as an essential precondition for his own method identifying the characteristics of a given crisis. Yet a failure to examine and assess the motives behind the fight is likely to lead to the sort of manipulative approach widespread among technocratic U.S. policy makers in the mid-sixties. Strong evidence to this effect is provided by Merrill who does not fail to speculate on motives when it comes to June 1950. Mitchell's model presents a different problem: as Merrill acknowledges, Korea was a divided country, not a country threatened from without. This is a crucial point; surely the very specificity of the Korean situation is that it was one country. Finally, the third of Mitchell's variables, the structure of the intervening state's decision-making process is, by Merrill's own admission, of little use regarding the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) given present knowledge.



2. Merrill raises the fundamental question of the legitimacy of the two states and also notes the difficulty of choosing an appropriate time frame. These two issues go together. On the latter, one must go back to 1945, however cursorily. This is when Korea was divided, and the question of "North versus South" or "Left versus Right" cannot be answered fairly without going back this far. Without due emphasis on the division and its origins, it is hard to answer the main question: Why the Korean War? If one compares Korea with Vietnam, it is striking that no one asks who started the Vietnam War. It is simply not deemed relevant. The repeated emphasis in the West (and in the socialist countries, too) on who started the Korean War dehistoricizes the issue of class struggle in Korea.

A discussion of the Korean War must be set firmly in the context of class struggle from 1945 on, and it must also consider fairly the legitimacy of the two Korean regimes. The reasons for the war—and the nature of the war itself—are integrally tied to the legitimacy of the two regimes. To his great credit, Merrill does raise this issue, but in my opinion fails to explore it deeply enough. If one takes just three basic criteria—political origins, social policies, and degree of dependence on outside forces—the DPRK had an incomparably stronger claim not only to legitimacy, but to represent the Korean people as a whole. The DPRK leadership emerged out of the anti-Japanese struggle and guerrilla warfare; the Republic of Korea (ROK) regime, including the army and police, was heavily staffed by former members of the Japanese occupation and collaborators. The DPRK carried out a major land reform and formally recognized the equality of women in 1946; in the South, although some land reform did take place, social and economic relations were not changed substantially. As for foreign dependence, the Soviet Red Army had withdrawn from the North by 1949, certainly formally and perhaps de facto. (This is controversial; the evidence is inconclusive, but even by hostile Western estimates, its presence was considerably weaker than the U.S. military's in the South.) The United States left behind a major military organization in the South in 1949, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG), which, according to official U.S. Army history, expanded as U.S. troops withdrew.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike most commentators and analysts, Merrill also mentions a number of episodes in 1948 that bear directly on the claims of P'yŏngyang and Seoul to represent the Korean people. In particular, Merrill provides valuable information on the summer 1948 underground

plebiscite, and also refers to the Haeju Conference, attended by leaders from both South and North. By now the evidence that the majority of Korea's population was against separate elections in 1948 is overwhelming. But I think two further points need to be made. First, the discredit and political ostracism cast on the Rhee regime as a result of its collaboration with an operation devised and imposed by outside forces, and that split the country—perhaps the greatest crime in the eyes of the Korean people—must not be underestimated. The Haeju and P'yŏngyang conferences (the latter was attended by virtually every political leader in Korea except Rhee,<sup>2</sup> all of whom agreed on a basic minimum platform) gave, I believe, tremendous legitimacy to the DPRK's claim to represent the Korean people and, conversely, delegitimized the Rhee regime. Second, it is also necessary to scrutinize the DPRK's claims as they were put forward. The DPRK has always centered its case on the summer 1948 underground plebiscite. This has usually been dismissed in the West either as never having taken place at all, or as an overwhelmingly fraudulent claim. Merrill's most valuable information (from U.S. sources) helps to put this claim into perspective and confirms that a referendum did indeed take place. But can this be considered good grounds for the DPRK claim? In my opinion it cannot, on the basis of current evidence. The whole point of the DPRK claim is to establish legal grounds for its legitimacy. But such grounds need firm proof. It is not only a question of whether the DPRK claims are true or not; it is also a question of the essentially nonverifiable nature of the evidence, and the inherently unsatisfactory conditions in which the poll took place (of course, the DPRK cannot be blamed for this). My point is that it is necessary to consider all of this evidence—the Haeju and P'yŏngyang conferences, plus the underground plebiscite—and weigh each aspect independently. In my opinion, the Haeju and P'yŏngyang conferences are compelling evidence in favor of the DPRK's claims, and the plebiscite is not.

3. Closely related to this is the role of the United Nations. Merrill notes that "the decision to hold separate elections ran counter to the opinion of most members of the UN Commission and Korean political leaders." I would have liked to see more emphasis on this important point, which is still not generally given adequate attention in the West. For the UN role in 1947-48 ties in directly with its role in 1950. In 1947-48, the UN intervened in Korea in tremendous ignorance and sanctioned the division of Korea against the wishes of the Korean

2. George McCune, *Korea Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 263; John Gunther, *The Riddle of MacArthur* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1951), p. 170.

1. Robert K. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Chief of Military History, 1962), p. 42.



people. Not only that, it lied in order to do so. Its claim to have "observed" the 1948 elections when the team briefly visited only 2 percent of the polling stations<sup>3</sup> is like a referee for a jousting match who, without making a proper check of the weapons each side carried, looks at part of the field for less than two minutes. Anyone claiming to have "observed" such a match would be called a liar, and his evidence treated with circumspection. The UN role deserves even more attention because its sloppy work was repeated in 1950, as was its use by the United States to swing world opinion.

4. Merrill's paper leads up to the start of the Korean War in June 1950. The author gives us very valuable information about both the guerrilla warfare in the South and the level of fighting along the thirty-eighth parallel prior to June 25, 1950—especially the letter from General Roberts to General Bolté (Aug. 19, 1949), which pins the responsibility for heavy fighting across the parallel in the summer of 1949 squarely on the ROK. Nevertheless, the information about the fighting near the parallel could be drawn more tightly together with information about the guerrilla warfare, and the latter with the high level of general political struggle throughout the South from 1945 on. The war was not just a military episode, and in my opinion its causes are found at the political level. The 1946 Taegu riots and the popular uprisings of 1948 are two links in a long chain of political struggle, which is the essential background of the guerrilla struggle and the outbreak of full-scale warfare in June 1950. Second, Merrill does not properly categorize the decision by the DPRK to cross the parallel in force in June 1950, nor set this decision in context. Given that Korea was one country, that the legitimacy of the Rhee regime was open to serious question, and that there had been heavy fighting across the parallel initiated by the ROK, it would seem fair to compare the North's "invasion" of the South to the 1944 "invasion of France" (as it is called, interestingly). In other words, whatever one's reservations about the DPRK regime in 1950, what was the political nature of the attempt to topple the Rhee regime, remembering that the DPRK (like the ROK) claimed to represent all of Korea? Did de Gaulle invade France in 1944 or help to liberate it? Or both?

5. Merrill discusses relations between the southern and northern Communists prior to June 1950. Evidence on this issue is flimsy, but it is an important question, not least because the North's decision to execute the top southern Communists at the end of the war continues to affect the attitudes of the Left in the South toward the northern

regime, and deeply influences the attitudes that outsiders sympathetic to the Korean people hold toward the DPRK leadership and reunification.

Without going too deeply into the strength of the evidence, it must be said that the case made by the DPRK on this issue is unconvincing. In a verbal presentation, Merrill noted that U.S. intelligence reports indicate that Pak Hŏn-yŏng had a cautious policy. In any event, it is hard to believe the accusation that Pak misled the DPRK leadership as to the political situation in the South. First, as a southern emigré once put it to me, "Pak Hŏn-yŏng knew the South like the back of his hand." Given the lack of evidence that Pak was in any way an adventurer, plus his acknowledged close awareness of the situation in the South, it is unlikely that he was responsible for giving misleading information or advice. But, second, the content of the accusation is completely irrelevant. The evidence (e.g., in General Dean's memoirs)<sup>4</sup> is that popular support for the overthrow of Rhee and for the Korean People's Army (KPA) was high, even if actual political organization was poor (as claimed by Kim Il-sung, for example, in his speech to the Aliarcham Academy in Indonesia in 1965).<sup>5</sup> But in any case, this was not the factor that led to the failure of the DPRK to reunify the country. The crucial factor was the scale and swiftness of the U.S. intervention. If Pak had been accused of failing to predict this, the accusation would at least have been relevant (although it could still have been misplacing the blame).

Moreover, if the accusation about misleading the DPRK leadership were true, then Pak should have been fired in 1950, as was Mu Jŏng, for example (another important case that raises disturbing questions). That Pak was not removed in 1950, but only tried with the other top southern leaders after the end of the war, raises questions about the relationship between northern and southern Communists that badly needs further study. The timing makes it tempting to think that the problem had more to do with the ending of the war (although this could be misleading, since it might have been thought best to postpone the trials until after the war was over, even if the accusations referred to earlier events).

Last, and most interesting, the upshot of the accusation is that the North did indeed "invade" the South. The DPRK decision to cross the parallel in force on June 25 was based on criteria other than the very narrow one adduced then and now by the DPRK—namely repelling

4. William F. Dean, *General Dean's Story* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), p. 68.

5. Kim Il-sung, "On the Socialist Construction in the DPRK and the Revolution in South Korea," Lecture at the Aliarcham Academy of Social Sciences, Indonesia, Apr. 14, 1965, in Kim, *Selected Works*, 2 (P'yŏngyang, 1965):554-55.

3. Jon Halliday, "The United Nations and Korea," in *Without Parallel: The American Korean Relationship Since 1945*, ed. Frank Baldwin (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 121.

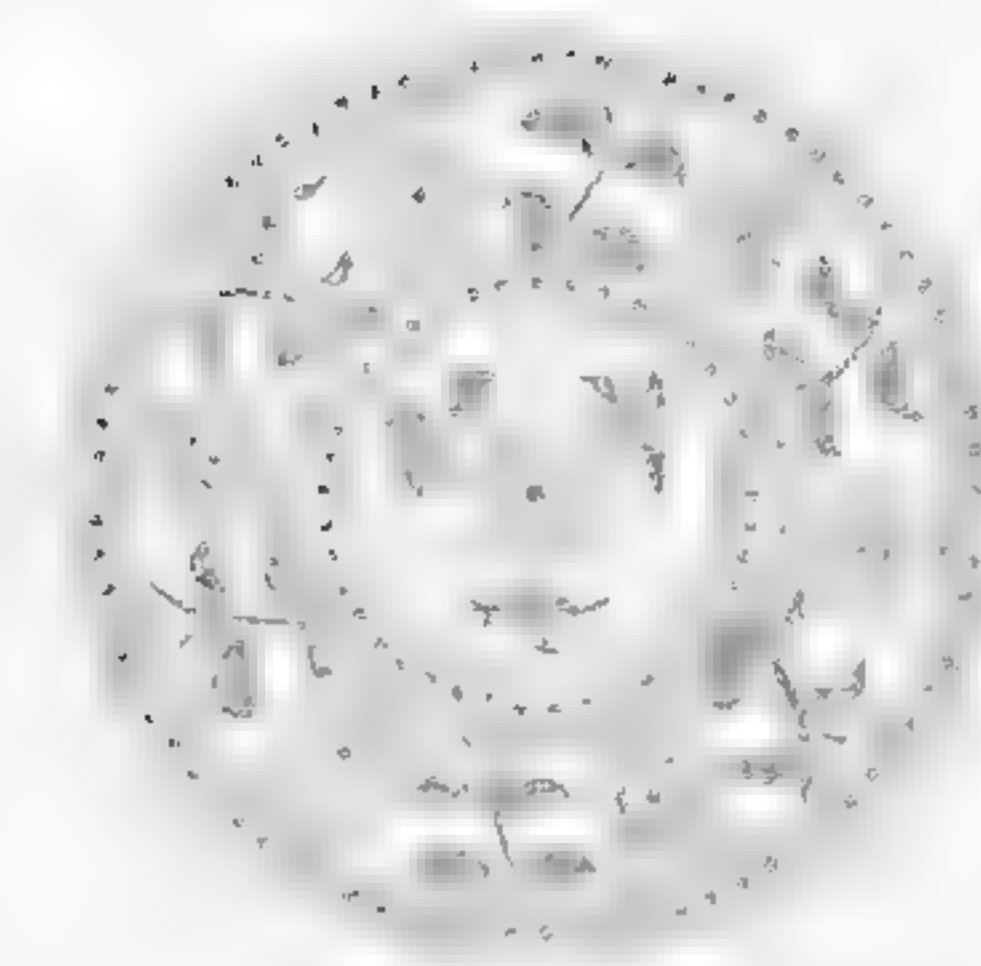


an ROK Army invasion earlier that morning. The DPRK has never produced evidence to show that whatever the ROKA did early on the morning of June 25 was anything out of the ordinary, in a military sense. Indeed, the information given me by KPA officers (who had been on the front line on June 25) whom I interviewed in P'yŏngyang in July 1977 was that the ROKA advance did not get very far—only some two kilometers.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the accusation against Pak is indirect confirmation that the DPRK decision was based on political criteria—namely, cross the parallel and topple Rhee—and that the size of any military action initiated by the ROKA on June 25 is of secondary importance (which does not rule out the possibility that there was indeed some fairly major ROKA assault, or that the North interpreted some ROKA action to be particularly serious).

6. Finally, two points of detail. First, I cannot quite agree with Merrill's criticism of the study by Karunakar Gupta in *China Quarterly*.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, Gupta did present limited evidence, but his basic claims were not dented by his critics, and he raised important, still unanswered questions. The second point concerns the famous Acheson speech of January 1950 about Korea and the U.S. "defense perimeter." I am not at all sure that the conventional interpretation of this speech—either what Acheson meant, or how the speech was read in P'yŏngyang or Moscow—is accurate. After all, the United States had KMAG going strong in Korea and was training Koreans in Japan. There may have been room for serious doubt about U.S. intentions, but I think if the Acheson speech is to be relied on as a major piece of evidence, then it must be weighted both against U.S. deeds in Korea and subsequent acts, particularly the appointment of John Foster Dulles in the spring of 1950 to supervise U.S. Far East policy, and his specific activities and commitments in Korea immediately before June 25.

6. Interview with six senior KPA officers, P'yŏngyang, July 26, 1977.

7. Karunakar Gupta, "How Did the Korean War Begin?" *China Quarterly*, no. 52 (1972); Gupta's critics in *China Quarterly*, no. 54 (1973), with Gupta's reply.



## Korea: Test Case of Containment in Asia

JAMES I. MATRAY

ON JUNE 29, 1949, THE UNITED STATES WITHDREW THE LAST OF ITS COMBAT forces from Korea, thus ending almost four years of military occupation. Less than one year later, a well-equipped North Korean army launched a massive assault across the thirty-eighth parallel in pursuit of forcible reunification. Almost immediately, some observers charged that President Harry Truman was in large part responsible for the outbreak of the Korean conflict. After creating an anti-Communist government in South Korea, critics explained, the Truman administration refused to provide the Republic of Korea (ROK) with sufficient moral and material support to ensure its survival.<sup>1</sup> Far worse, American military withdrawal from South Korea constituted an invitation—a

1. Leland M. Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the U.N.* (New York, 1956), pp. 94-95; Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 149; Soon-sung Cho, *Korea in World Politics 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 244; Robert H. Ferrell, "George C. Marshall," in *American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, ed. Samuel Hagg Bemis and Robert H. Ferrell (New York: Cooper Square, 1966), pp. 248-49.



green light—for North Korea to invade. For many analysts, Truman's decision to order military disengagement from Korea clearly indicated his reluctance to practice containment outside Europe and his rejection of a firm commitment to halt Soviet expansion in Asia.

Such an assessment of Truman's Korea policy, however, does not provide an accurate picture of the nature and extent of American commitments in South Korea prior to the North Korean attack. For more than three years, Truman had resisted strong pressure from American military leaders to withdraw from South Korea at the earliest possible date. The president accepted instead the State Department's argument that the United States could not abandon the ROK because a Communist seizure of control throughout Korea would seriously damage American credibility in the international community and preclude the successful containment of Soviet expansion in Asia. The Truman administration's consideration of its Korea policy after 1946 increasingly involved a search for a strategy that would allow the United States to withdraw militarily from South Korea without giving up the area to Soviet domination. The administration wanted to avoid a complete commitment of American power and prestige in defense of South Korea. Truman's determination to reduce defense spending and balance the federal budget also encouraged a limited approach. The State Department sought international approval and support for the ROK to bolster morale and thus contribute to internal strength and stability. Moreover, since the United Nations had advocated publicly an early Soviet-American withdrawal from Korea, the United States could not remain in military occupation without undermining the ROK's claim to legitimacy. Truman's decision to authorize American withdrawal from the Korean peninsula came only after he had concluded that a continuation of military occupation was not essential to the survival of South Korea.

His assessment rested on the basic assumption that Stalin would not resort to open aggression to extend the area of Soviet control, but would rely instead on the tactics of subversion and political penetration. Through the extension of economic aid, technical advice, and limited military assistance, the administration believed it could help South Korea to achieve the internal political and economic strength necessary to withstand Communist political pressure.<sup>2</sup> For Truman

2. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, *Military Situation in the Far East: Joint Hearings to Conduct an Inquiry into the Military Situation in the Far East and the Facts Surrounding the Relief of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur from his Assignment in that Area*, testimony of Dean G. Acheson, vol. 3, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., 1951, p. 1991; Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 331;

and his advisers, the ROK's eventual capacity for self-defense, rather than American combat troops or a firm guarantee of military protection, was the key to containment in Korea. The administration's decision to withdraw, therefore, did not reflect a desire to abandon American commitments in South Korea; disengagement marked only a shift in policy from reliance on military to economic means—and reliance on the ROK to beat back an attack, at least in the initial stages—as the crucial element in Truman's strategy for containing Soviet expansionist ambitions in Korea.

During the spring of 1946, Soviet-American negotiations for the reunification of Korea reached a deadlock, largely because the two sides could not agree on a representative group of Korean leaders with which to consult in the formation of a provisional government. Initially, Truman was confident that if the United States remained patient and refused to compromise, the Soviet Union eventually would become frustrated and accept the American position. By late 1946, however, it was obvious that the administration's policy of delay was a complete failure. Not only had Moscow refused to resume negotiations, but South Korea was suffering from violent political unrest and steady economic deterioration.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps more important, the War Department was beginning to pressure Truman to approve disengagement from Korea at the earliest possible date. Rapid postwar demobilization had led to serious shortages in manpower and material. American military leaders argued that the United States could make better use of its limited resources in areas greater in strategic importance than Korea.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Truman administration clearly recognized early in 1947 the need to develop a more positive course of action to resolve the Korean predicament.

Muccio to Acheson, June 9, 1950, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter, *FRUS*), 1950 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 7:99-101; George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 485; for analysis and interpretation, see John Lewis Gaddis, "Korea in American Politics, Strategy, and Diplomacy, 1945-50," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia*, ed. Yonosuke Nagai and Akira Iriye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 283-84, 286-87; Akira Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 177; William Reitzel, Morton A. Kaplan, and Constance G. Coblenz, *United States Foreign Policy 1945-1955* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1956), p. 2.

3. James I. Matray, "The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea 1911-1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1977), pp. 192-234.

4. Norstad memo, Nov. 26, 1946, Record Group (hereafter, RG) 319, Records of the Army Staff, Plans and Operations Files (hereafter, P & O Files), decimal file 137, TS, sec. 1, box 73, cases 2-24, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; and Norstad memo, Jan. 4, 1947, in *ibid.*, decimal file 091, Korea, sec. 3, box 87, cases 16-50.



On January 29, 1947, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) met to consider American problems in Korea. Secretary of War Robert Patterson opened the discussions with the flat statement that Korea was the "single most urgent problem now facing the War Department." The American zone of occupation had made little progress in economic recovery because of insufficient transportation facilities, electrical power, and fertilizer. Without additional financial resources, Patterson warned, the United States could not safely maintain an occupation force in South Korea. In response, the SWNCC decided to approach Congress with a request for financial assistance. It created a special interdepartmental committee to formulate a specific aid program for Korea.<sup>5</sup>

After nearly a month of study, the committee concluded that continued occupation of Korea would be impossible if the United States attempted to maintain its present policy. At the same time, American military withdrawal and the creation of a separate government would produce only further economic deterioration and eventually lead to Soviet domination of the entire peninsula. Nor could the United States refer the Korean matter to the UN, because that would be an admission of failure and invite Soviet charges of bad faith. The committee's report portrayed the Soviet-American confrontation in Korea as a "test of strength" that the United States could not lose without serious world-wide complications. Consequently, the special committee recommended the adoption of a plan for \$600 million in economic assistance over three years. Such a program would demonstrate to Congress Truman's determination to fulfill American commitments in Korea, and to Moscow, the extent of America's resolve. In addition, the committee decided Washington should raise the Korean issue at the next meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers and thereby publicize Soviet inflexibility.<sup>6</sup>

Administration officials thus demonstrated an early preference for economic means to counter Soviet expansion in Korea, just as Truman had in regard to Greece and Turkey in early 1947. If the United States spent enough money, the committee assumed, Stalin would be unable to match the American commitment and would have to retreat. The War Department enthusiastically endorsed the committee's recommendations, although it doubted Congress would approve the aid package. American military leaders voiced particularly strong support

5. SWNCC memo, Jan. 29, 1947, in *The Forrestal Diaries*, ed. Walter Millis (New York: Viking Press, 1951), pp. 241-42.

6. Special Interdepartmental Committee memo, Feb. 25, 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, 6:609-18.

for an immediate approach to the Soviet government with a request to resume negotiations. Apparently the War Department expected that implementation of the committee's plan would open the way to American withdrawal, either in conjunction with the Soviets or after the creation of a separate government in South Korea. Despite its firm opposition to a new overture to the Soviet Union, the State Department also advocated adoption of the recommendations of the special committee.<sup>7</sup>

Truman now possessed an aggressive policy alternative designed to break the Korean deadlock. Unfortunately, the administration confronted a difficult situation both at home and abroad early in 1947 that hampered decisive action. For Truman to implement the committee's proposal, he needed congressional authorization for economic assistance to Korea. As a result of the 1946 off-year elections, however, the Republicans had gained control of Congress and were able to block increased expenditures for defense and foreign aid.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, the crisis in Greece forced the administration to focus attention on events in Europe. Nevertheless, work on an aid program for Korea continued. During Senate hearings on aid to Greece, Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson confirmed that the administration was contemplating a three-year economic and technical assistance program for Korea. In its final form, the plan envisioned \$540 million in aid once the Koreans had elected a provisional government to rule the entire nation. If the Soviet Union refused to permit reunification, the United States would implement the program in South Korea on its own. According to the plan, within three months the State Department would assume responsibility from the War Department for American policy in Korea. On March 28, Acheson informed Patterson that the budget proposal for fiscal 1948 would include a provision for aid to Korea.<sup>9</sup>

7. U.S. Department of War, Intelligence Division memo, Feb. 11, 1947, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, sec. 3, box 87, cases 16-50, and Norstad to Robert P. Patterson, Feb. 25, 1947, *ibid.*, decimal file 092, TS, 1946-1948, case 85; John Carter Vincent and John M. Hildring to George C. Marshall, Feb. 28, 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, 6:618-19.

8. Diary of William D. Leahy, Feb. 27, 1947, William D. Leahy Papers, box 5, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Joseph Marion Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks (February 21-June 5, 1947)* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1955), pp. 90-91; John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 317, 352.

9. *New York Times*, Mar. 21, 1947, p. 12, and Mar. 25, 1947, p. 8; Hildring to Vincent, Mar. 25, 1947, and Vincent to Hildring, Mar. 27, 1947, in RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, decimal file 740.00119, Control (Korea)/3-27-47, National Archives; Acheson to Patterson, Mar. 28, 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, 6:621-23.



Truman's advisers had thus devised a policy to contain Soviet expansion in Korea without a major commitment of American military power. Once Korea had developed the economic and political stability necessary for self-defense the United States could safely withdraw. The SWNCC also formulated a program for limited military assistance to Korea. The United States would provide small arms and enough radios, vehicles, and spare parts to equip the existing constabulary army of 25,000 men. An American attempt to match Soviet military power in Korea would be unwise and dangerous. In summary, State Department official John Carter Vincent explained that "our program seems to us to be the only feasible way of accomplishing" the reduction of American commitments "once we rule out the alternative of abandonment of Korea to USSR domination."<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) also supported the Korean aid program. In a report submitted to the SWNCC in May 1947, the JCS ranked Korea second to the Philippines in its strategic unimportance to American national security in East Asia; on the other hand, only Greece, Italy, and Iran had a greater need than Korea for assistance. The JCS concluded then that the United States had to adopt an economic aid program for Korea because

this is the one country within which we alone have for almost two years carried on ideological warfare in direct contact with our opponents, so that to lose this battle would be gravely detrimental to United States prestige, and therefore security, throughout the world. To abandon this struggle would tend to confirm the suspicion that the United States is not really determined to accept the responsibilities and obligations of world leadership, with consequent detriment to our efforts to bolster those countries of Western Europe which are of primary and vital importance to our national security.

Korea's value was thus related to America's ideological and diplomatic competition with the Soviet Union, rather than to strategic considerations. The JCS study did, however, caution that "current assistance should be given Korea only if the means exist after sufficient assistance has been given the countries of primary importance. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, Truman had authorized one final approach to the Soviet government, a request to reopen bilateral negotiations. In April 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall traveled to Moscow for the fourth meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers. After an exchange of several letters, Molotov and Marshall reached an agreement for the resumption of Soviet-American discussions on Korean reunifica-

10. SWNCC Ad Hoc Committee Report on the Truman Doctrine, Feb. 21, 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, 6:727-30; Vincent to Acheson, Apr. 8, 1947, in RG 59, decimal file 740.00119, Control (Korea)/4-8-47.

11. JCS to SWNCC, May 5, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6:737-39.

tion. Truman and his advisers immediately concluded that the threat of American economic assistance to a separate South Korean government had forced the Soviets to compromise. The administration confidently expected Stalin to agree to a settlement in Korea on American terms once the United States began to carry out its aid program. As Acting Budget Director Frederick Lawton explained at the time, the State Department believed that "economic improvement in South Korea will help to overcome Soviet reluctance to reunite the two zones," and that reunification would facilitate the achievement of economic self-sufficiency, thereby reducing the cost and duration of American assistance. Containment in Korea thus promised victory at a relatively low price. On June 3, Lawton approved the allocation of \$215 million in aid to Korea for fiscal 1948 and forwarded the proposal to Truman for signature. Concurrently, the State Department prepared a presidential message to Congress requesting approval for aid to Korea.<sup>12</sup>

Congressional support for the administration's plan was far from certain. The prolonged debate on aid to Greece convinced Truman that Congress would be parsimonious on the issue of foreign aid regardless of the particular nation involved. Too many requests for assistance might also jeopardize the Marshall Plan for European recovery, and Chiang K'ai-shek was pressing the United States for more economic and military assistance for China. Truman was reluctant to provide aid to Chiang because of Communist military victories over the Kuomintang. Refusal to provide assistance to China, however, would make obtaining an appropriation for Korea far more difficult.<sup>13</sup> In any event, Truman never had to take the risk. On June 27, Senator Arthur Vandenberg informed Acheson that the Republicans would oppose any new authorizations for foreign assistance during the remainder of that congressional session.<sup>14</sup>

12. Marshall to Molotov, Apr. 9, 1947; Molotov to Marshall, Apr. 19, 1947; Marshall to Molotov, May 2, 1947; Molotov to Marshall, May 8, 1947; and Marshall to Molotov, May 12, 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, 6:633-34, 638-40; Lincoln to Norstad, May 12, 1947, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 092, TS, sec. 5a, pt. 1, box 31, case 85; Frederick J. Lawton to Truman, June 3, 1947, and Department of State draft speech, June 3, 1947, Official File 471 (miscellaneous), Harry S. Truman Papers, Truman Library, Independence, Mo.; for analysis and interpretation, see David J. Dallin, *Soviet Russia and the Far East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 304; Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, p. 158.

13. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks*, p. 137; Tang Tsou, *America's Failure in China 1911-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 446-53; Walter Lippman, *The Cold War: A Study of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Ronald Steel (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), pp. 45-46.

14. Acheson to Marshall, June 27, 1947, in RG 59, decimal file 740.00119, Control (Korea)/6-27-47; Acheson memo to "Jim" [Webb], August 1950, Dean G. Acheson Papers, box 65, Truman Library.



While Congress emerged as the major barrier to Truman's containment policy in Korea, Soviet-American negotiations for reunification of the peninsula experienced an almost complete collapse. Consequently, the administration decided to act with or without Soviet cooperation. During July, John Allison, assistant chief of the Division of Northeast Asian Affairs, formulated a proposed course of action that ultimately would lead to the creation of a separate government in South Korea. Under Allison's plan, the United States would attempt to gain Soviet approval for free elections under UN supervision to select delegates for a legislature in each zone of occupation. These Korean leaders then would select representatives to serve in a provisional government. After consultations with the four major powers, the new Korean government would arrange for the withdrawal of foreign troops and the acquisition of economic aid. If Moscow refused to accept America's proposal, the United States would submit the issue to the UN and alone implement the plan in South Korea.<sup>15</sup>

Early in August, an ad hoc committee of the SWNCC recommended approval of Allison's plan. In its report, the committee warned that, in the absence of positive action, rising violence in South Korea would force the United States to withdraw. To abandon Korea under such circumstances would guarantee Soviet control over the entire peninsula and "discourage those small nations now relying upon the U.S. to support them in resisting internal or external Communist pressure."<sup>16</sup> Patterson and Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal backed the adoption of Allison's proposal, presumably in the belief that it would speed withdrawal. The State Department supported the plan as well.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in a letter to Molotov dated August 26, newly appointed Undersecretary of State Robert Lovett proposed a four-power conference in Washington for consideration of the Korean problem. Lovett also recommended Allison's plan as a basis for discussion. In Moscow, American Ambassador Walter Bedell Smith observed that Soviet cooperation was extremely unlikely. Stalin, he thought, would never permit the emergence of an independent Korea because of the peninsula's strategic importance.<sup>18</sup>

On September 4, Molotov flatly rejected Lovett's proposal. The United States was responsible for the deadlock in Soviet-American

15. John M. Allison memo, July 29, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6:734-35.

16. SWNCC Ad Hoc Committee to SWNCC, Aug. 4, 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 735-41.

17. Hildring memo, Aug. 6, 1947, *ibid.*, p. 742; Hildring to Robert A. Lovett, Aug. 8, 1947, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, decimal file 895.00/8-847.

18. Lovett to Walter Bedell Smith, Aug. 26, 1947, and Smith to Lovett, Aug. 28, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6:771-76.

negotiations, the Soviet leader charged, and Moscow would not accept outside interference in the Korean dispute. In accordance with Allison's recommendations, Lovett informed Molotov on September 16 of Washington's decision to place the issue of Korea on the UN agenda. The following day, Secretary Marshall addressed the General Assembly and requested international action for the achievement of Korea's independence. Since Soviet-American negotiations had failed to resolve the Korean problem, only the UN could reunify the peninsula and remove this serious threat to world peace.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, Washington cabled the American proposal on Korea to its delegation at the UN. It provided for elections throughout Korea under international supervision within six months after the UN adopted the plan. The new Korean legislature, reflecting the two-to-one population superiority in the south, would formulate a constitution and appoint a provisional government. Finally, the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), composed of eleven nations, would monitor the elections and then report its findings to the General Assembly.<sup>20</sup>

For many, the administration's decision to submit the Korean issue to the UN was a clear indication of its desire to cast aside an unwanted burden. Truman and his advisers, critics argue, were attempting to exploit the UN in an effort to withdraw from Korea without appearing to abandon American commitment.<sup>21</sup> This interpretation does not, however, acceptably explain American actions. International involvement was an essential part of Truman's containment strategy in Korea. Given that American leaders expected the Soviets to refuse to cooperate with the UN, if the UN agreed to sponsor elections only in the American zone, a separate South Korean government would emerge with international approval. Obviously, moral and material support from the world community would contribute to South Korea's economic strength and political stability. Perhaps more important, UN sponsorship of South Korea might convince Congress to authorize economic assistance. American action at the UN would also provide the United States with an excellent opportunity to assume an un-

19. Molotov to Lovett, Sept. 4, 1947, and Lovett to Molotov, Sept. 16, 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 779-81, 790; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, pp. 324-25; George C. Marshall, "A Program for a More Effective United Nations," U.S. Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, no. 17, Sept. 28, 1947, p. 619; *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 1947, pp. 5, 8, 24.

20. Lovett to Warren Austin, Sept. 18, 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 6:794-95.

21. Denis Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War, and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 5-6; Cho, *Korea in World Politics*, p. 205; Tsou, *America's Failure in China*, p. 557; Henderson, *Korea*, p. 150; Goodrich, *Korea*, pp. 37-41.



equivocal stance in defense of national self-determination before the world community.<sup>22</sup>

Truman's advisers now began to consider more seriously an American military withdrawal from Korea. Early in September, the Policy Planning Staff (PPS) concluded that Korea's minor significance for American national security seemed to justify disengagement (see chapter one). Before making its final recommendations on withdrawal, the SWNCC requested comments from the JCS on the relationship between occupation of Korea and American national security. In a famous memorandum, the JCS responded categorically that "from the standpoint of military security, the United States has little strategic interest in maintaining present troops and bases in Korea. . . ." Truman's military advisers believed that any American offensive on the Asian mainland would bypass Korea and that an enemy position on the peninsula would be vulnerable to air attack. The United States could contribute more effectively to its national security if it deployed the Korean occupation forces in areas of greater strategic importance. The JCS also warned that in the absence of a major program for social, political, and economic rehabilitation, disorders and unrest in Korea would thoroughly undermine America's position. Forced withdrawal, rather than voluntary disengagement, would be humiliating and inflict far greater damage to the international prestige of the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, many American leaders rejected withdrawal. Francis Stevens of the Division of East European Affairs, for example, strongly disagreed. Certain ideological imponderables, he insisted, were more important than Korea's strategic value. Stevens opposed withdrawal on political grounds, explaining that Korea

is a symbol to the watching world both of the East-West struggle for influence and power and of American security in sponsoring the nationalistic aims of Asian peoples. If we allow Korea to go by default and to fall within the Soviet orbit, the world will feel that we have lost another round in our match with the Soviet Union, and our prestige and the hopes of those who place faith in us will suffer accordingly. In the Far East, the reliance of national movements on American support would be seriously shaken, and the consequences might be far reaching.<sup>24</sup>

A complete Communist victory in Korea, he felt, would only reinforce

22. Dean Rusk to Ernest Gross, May 9, 1947, RG 59, decimal file 895.00/5-947; Reitzel, Kaplan, and Coblenz, *United States Foreign Policy*, pp. 176-77; Jon Halliday, "The United Nations in Korea," in *Without Parallel: The American-Korean Relationship since 1945*, ed. Frank Baldwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 119.

23. JCS to SWNCC, Sept. 26, 1947, in *ibid.*, pp. 817-18; James V. Forrestal to Marshall, Sept. 26, 1947, Korean Documents, David Lloyd Papers, box 10, Truman Library.

24. Francis B. Stevens memo, Sept. 9, 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 6:784-85.

Stalin's devotion to his expansionist strategy of subversion and indirect aggression.

In addition, after visiting Korea on a fact-finding mission during the summer of 1947, Gen. Albert Wedemeyer warned against premature withdrawal. Any "ideological" retreat in Korea, he explained, would increase Soviet prestige in Asia and undermine America's position in Japan. Wedemeyer emphasized that "every possible opportunity must be used to seize the initiative in order to create and maintain bulwarks of freedom."<sup>25</sup> In Korea, Lt. Gen. John Hodge, the occupation commander, agreed with Wedemeyer's assessment. During discussions with the new Secretary of the Army Kenneth Royall, he stressed that the United States could not tolerate further Soviet expansion without severe damage to American prestige. Although he shared the JCS's assessment of Korea's limited strategic value, Hodge favored only staged withdrawal over a nine-month period. Prior to departure, the United States would have to train and equip a strong local army. Since economic self-sufficiency was the key to South Korea's survival, Hodge also advocated implementation of a five-year rehabilitation program.<sup>26</sup>

Apparently these warnings convinced Truman's military advisers that outright abandonment of Korea was not the proper course of action. The Department of the Army now decided in favor of the adoption of a one billion dollar aid program for Korea over five years, which would permit the United States to withdraw safely. But it adamantly opposed continuation of the current American policy, lest Korea become a permanent and unprofitable liability. Through interdepartmental coordination and congressional cooperation, the Army Department speculated that the United States could build an "ideological bridgehead on the Asian mainland." Hodge indicated in a subsequent cable, however, that American expectations were far more grandiose. Once South Korea developed economic and political strength, he predicted, "national feeling among the north Koreans may be aroused and sufficient pressure brought to bear upon the Soviets to compel them to permit . . . an amalgamation of the two areas."<sup>27</sup> If successful, containment in Korea thus held the promise of eventual liberation of the entire peninsula.

Moscow responded to Washington's adoption of a more positive

25. Albert C. Wedemeyer report, Sept. 19, 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 6:796-803.

26. T. N. Dupuy to Norstad, Oct. 2, 1947, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, sec. 3, box 89, case 106.

27. *Economic Report on Korea*, Sept. 23, 1947, and Department of the Army memo, Sept. 23, 1947, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, box 89, case 106; and John R. Hodge to JCS, Nov. 21, 1947, *ibid.*, 15, FW 38.



approach in Korea with a surprising ploy of its own. On September 26, the Soviet occupation commander recommended Soviet-American military withdrawal from the peninsula, arguing that the Koreans could then resolve their own differences. It seems that Stalin was attempting to force American disengagement prior to the application of containment in Korea.<sup>28</sup> Administration officials thought that without American military protection, South Korea's survival was doubtful, given North Korea's presumed economic and military superiority. Yet Moscow's proposal also would provide justification for American withdrawal once Korea had achieved the capacity for self-defense.<sup>29</sup> As a result, when Ambassador Warren Austin formally presented the American proposal on Korea to the UN, the resolution included provisions for Soviet-American military withdrawal ninety days after the creation of a Korean provisional government. On November 14, 1947, the United States accomplished a major policy objective when the General Assembly voted by a wide margin to approve the American-sponsored resolution on Korea.<sup>30</sup>

International involvement in Korean affairs added urgency and importance to the administration's task of developing a definitive plan for future American action in Korea. Without a strong American commitment, Washington feared that the UN would eventually abandon its responsibilities in Korea. In December 1947, Truman therefore instructed the State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Committee (SANACC) to formulate a program for building a stronger constabulary army in Korea and implementing a multi-year plan for economic development. The SANACC agreed that the United States had to fulfill its obligations in Korea or risk severe damage to American prestige.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, American military leaders completed a tentative timetable

28. Joseph E. Jacobs to Marshall, Sept. 26, 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 6:816-17; *New York Times*, Sept. 27, 1947, p. 1; Arthur C. Bunce to Edwin Martin, Sept. 28, 1947, RG 59, decimal file 740.00119, Control (Korea)/9-2847, National Archives.

29. Department of State memo, Sept. 24, 1947, *ibid.*, 9-2447, National Archives; W. Walton Butterworth to Lovett, Oct. 1, 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 6:820; cabinet meeting, Sept. 29, 1947, *The Forrestal Diaries*, pp. 321-22; several American observers at the time expressed opposition to withdrawal from Korea. *New York Times*, Sept. 27, 1947, p. 14; *Time*, Oct. 6, 1947, p. 31; *Business Week*, Oct. 4, 1947, pp. 109-11.

30. Austin to Trygve Lie, Oct. 17, 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 6:832-35; *New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1947, p. 14; memo, Nov. 4, 1947, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, sec. 3, box 87, cases 16-50; Austin to Marshall, Nov. 14, 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 6:857-59.

31. Schuyler to Blum, Jan. 2, 1948, RG 218, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45), sec. 14, National Archives.

for military withdrawal. This Department of the Army study speculated that Korean elections would occur no later than March 31, 1948. If the national assembly convened by May 15, the report continued, Korea would have a provisional government no later than August 15. In accordance with the UN resolution, the United States would complete military withdrawal ninety days later, or on November 15, 1948. Meanwhile, the administration would present a financial aid request to Congress for Korea. Such limited assistance, it was hoped, would place Korea on the road to economic self-sufficiency.<sup>32</sup>

Beginning in January 1948, Army Department officials started to press the State Department to complete a financial assistance program for Korea. If the administration did not submit a request to Congress before March 1, they cautioned, American military withdrawal could not proceed on schedule.<sup>33</sup> Truman's diplomatic advisers were suspicious of the military's apparent desire to get out quickly. W. Walton Butterworth, director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, observed that the United States possessed a moral commitment to Korea and had to avoid any appearance of attempting to "scuttle and run." Although it was willing to support withdrawal by November 15, the State Department was convinced that flexibility was essential: South Korea must have an adequate security force prior to American departure. Secretary Marshall expressed serious misgivings about whether the Army Department plan would permit enough time to train a constabulary army sufficiently powerful and disciplined to prevent a North Korean invasion. Consequently, the State Department decided to encourage Army Department officials to begin immediate shipment of arms to Korea and to train more Koreans for military service.<sup>34</sup>

Undersecretary of the Army William Draper was dissatisfied with the State Department's attitude. Marshall and his colleagues, he complained, seemed to consider the adoption of a firm date for withdrawal as synonymous with appeasement. During his testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Draper emphasized that the United States could not remain in occupation of Korea forever. Sooner

32. Memo to Wedemeyer, Nov. 24, 1947, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, TS, sec. 3, cases 3-15; Schuyler to Arnold, Dec. 30, 1947, *ibid.*, sec. 5; War Council meeting minutes, Dec. 5, 1947, General Correspondence 1945-1947, box 23, Robert P. Patterson Papers, Library of Congress.

33. Seedlock memo, Jan. 31, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 3, cases 3-15, and Maddocks memo, Feb. 9, 1948, RG 319, CSA decimal file 091, Korea, TS.

34. Butterworth to Marshall, Mar. 4, 1948, and Allison memo, Mar. 5, 1948, *FRUS, 1948* 8:1137-41.



or later, the Koreans would have to resolve their own problems.<sup>35</sup> Draper's consternation was understandable. During February 1948, the JCS concluded that the United States could not block a Soviet thrust into Europe without congressional approval of a \$9 billion supplement to the defense budget. Truman refused to approve the request, explaining that the United States could not counter Soviet expansion everywhere and still maintain its domestic economic strength.<sup>36</sup> Such limitations on defense spending meant that withdrawal from those areas not vital to American security was inevitable. Truman therefore decided to authorize the JCS to prepare for disengagement from Korea before the end of 1948.<sup>37</sup>

On April 2, 1948, Truman received the final SANACC report on American policy in Korea. The proposal, National Security Council (NSC) Paper 8, outlined steps for the creation of a separate and independent South Korea with a sound economy, a progressive educational system, and strong popular support. NSC 8 noted that South Korea suffered from serious economic problems and the threat of military invasion from a Soviet-sponsored regime in the north. To abandon South Korea to Communist domination would improve the Soviet political and strategic situation with respect to China and Japan and weaken America's position in Asia. Consequently, NSC 8 recommended that the United States provide \$185 million in economic aid to Korea for fiscal 1949 and sustain a small constabulary army capable of self-defense "against any but an overt act of aggression by north Korea or other forces." The paper also projected American military withdrawal from Korea no later than December 31, 1948. Significantly, NSC 8 included a warning that the United States should "not become so irrevocably involved in the Korean situation that any action taken by any faction in Korea or by any other power in Korea could be considered a *casus belli* for the U.S."<sup>38</sup>

Truman's approval of NSC 8 was indicative of his desire to pursue a middle road in responding to the Soviet challenge in Korea. The United States could not "cut and run"; America's allies and adversaries alike would condemn Washington for exploiting the UN as a cover for

35. Biddle to Wedemeyer, Mar. 5, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 3, box 21, cases 3-15; Herbert Druks, *Harry S. Truman and the Russians 1945-1953* (New York: Speller, 1966), p. 226.

36. Warner R. Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense: Fiscal 1950," in *Strategy, Politics and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 41.

37. Army to Douglas MacArthur, Mar. 18, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 1, box 20, case 1.

38. Sidney Souers to Harry S. Truman, Apr. 2, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1163-69.

abandonment of Korea. Nor was Truman willing to guarantee fully South Korea's political independence and territorial integrity against open military aggression from any quarter. The Soviet military advantage on the Asian mainland would make such a guarantee foolhardy at best. Instead, the Truman administration would attempt to foster indigenous economic strength, political stability, and military power so that South Korea could provide for its own protection. Truman based his decision on the crucial assumption that the Soviet Union would not permit a North Korean invasion for military conquest of the entire peninsula. As Truman's Chief of Staff Admiral William Leahy explained at the time, the administration was confident that "the U.S.S.R. does not intend to accomplish its political purposes by the use of armed forces but will continue its efforts by infiltration and underground activities."<sup>39</sup>

Immediately thereafter, Royall and Draper traveled to South Korea in the company of four American economic experts to gather the necessary information for a specific assistance program. After three days of discussions with prominent local businessmen and political leaders, Truman's advisers observed that the Koreans were anxious to assume control over their own affairs. In its report, the army committee offered this conclusion:

For a time after withdrawal . . . the new independent Korean government will require continuing American aid, advice, food and raw materials in order to maintain at least the present ration level and to achieve necessary rehabilitation and governmental effectiveness. This assistance we feel should be provided for an interim period, with steps taken to assure that it is properly utilized. The Committee believes that firm support by the United States and the United Nations to the new Korean government will inestimably help to develop participation in future Far Eastern trade on a basis valuable to the Korean people and to their neighbors.<sup>40</sup>

Financial assistance alone, the committee reasoned, would provide Korea with the means to train technicians and to exploit its own resources. Eventually, South Korea would realize the capacity for self-sufficient economic growth.

State Department officials voiced immediate support for the army committee's recommendations. As a result, the Truman administration decided to continue financial assistance through fiscal 1949 to guarantee safe American withdrawal with minimal loss of prestige. If the new

39. Ibid.; Leahy diary, Jan. 8, 1948, Leahy Diaries 1948-1950, box 6, Leahy Papers.

40. U.S. Department of the Army, *Economic Position and Prospects of Japan and Korea and Measures Required to Improve Them*, U.S. Army Committee Report, Apr. 26, 1948.



Korean government "shows more vitality than they expect it will," American leaders then would consider implementation of a major recovery program during fiscal 1950.<sup>41</sup> Despite such reservations, Truman and his advisers were optimistic about the prospects for successful containment in Korea. The economic recovery and political stability the Koreans could achieve with American aid and advice would frustrate the Soviet strategy of expansion. South Korea would emerge as a viable, democratic Asian nation capable of self-defense and worthy of emulation.

As expected, the Soviet Union refused to cooperate with the UN plans for elections in Korea, and denied it access to North Korea. In addition, some members of UNTCOK strongly opposed further UN action, arguing that separate elections would confirm the permanence of Korea's partition. In response to considerable diplomatic pressure from the United States, however, the UN authorized the supervision of elections in South Korea alone.<sup>42</sup> On May 10, 1948, Koreans living south of the thirty-eighth parallel elected delegates to a "national" assembly. Over 90 percent of all registered voters cast ballots and, at some polling places, the election process took only four hours. Joseph Jacobs, Hodge's political adviser, remarked candidly that the extreme efficiency of the election "should give rise to a certain degree of caution and reservation in our appraisal. . . ."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, American officials in the United States and Korea were pleased with the results. Secretary Marshall, in his message of congratulations, explained that the extent of voter participation, "despite the lawless efforts of a Communist-dominated minority to prevent or sabotage the election, is a revelation that the Korean people are determined to form their own government by democratic means."<sup>44</sup>

41. Seedlock memo, Apr. 16, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 4, box 22, cases 16-30; Lovett to Jacobs, Apr. 16, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1179-80.

42. *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1948, p. 14; Jacobs to Marshall, Feb. 2, 5, and 6, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1089-91, 1093-95; Goodrich, *Korea*, p. 50; Marshall to certain embassies, Feb. 9, 1948; Marshall to Austin, Feb. 18, 1948; Marshall to British Embassy, Feb. 21, 1948; Marshall to Indian Embassy, Feb. 24, 1948; Austin to Marshall, Feb. 24, 1948, *ibid.*, pp. 1098-99, 1116-17, 1124-25, 1127-29; *New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1948, p. 8, and Feb. 27, 1948, p. 1; see also Leon Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Unification of Korea: The Politics of Field Operations 1947-1950* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1959), pp. 71-75.

43. *New York Times*, May 11, 1948, p. 11; Jacobs to Marshall, May 12, 1948, decimal file 895.00/5-1248; Gordenker, *The United Nations and the Peaceful Unification of Korea*, p. 105; Jacobs to Marshall, May 13, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1195-97.

44. Marshall statement, Mar. 12, 1948, in Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, no. 18, May 30, 1948, p. 700.

The elections meant that the United States could proceed with military disengagement on schedule. On May 22, the JCS ordered Hodge to implement the first phase of withdrawal—code-named Crabapple.<sup>45</sup> Soon after, American military dependents began to leave Korea. At the same time, Hodge authorized the transfer of surplus equipment and supplies to the constabulary and in Washington, Secretary of the Army Royall ordered the shipment of a six-month supply of ammunition and spare parts. Tactical troop withdrawal would start on August 15. Royall then asked the State Department to organize an embassy to relieve the occupation as soon as possible.<sup>46</sup> The department, however, was determined to resist a hasty retreat. On July 8, Lovett reminded Royall that NSC 8 called for a flexible policy on withdrawal, and coordination with the UN. The Army Department could initiate disengagement, but the State Department insisted that it might suspend, adjust, or delay the operation at a moment's notice.<sup>47</sup>

Some Army Department officials now charged that the State Department was unwilling to accept responsibility for American policy in Korea. They urged Royall to demand that Truman's diplomatic advisers cease hampering American withdrawal. Military leaders also complained that the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) was not demonstrating any interest whatsoever in Korea. Army Department officials strongly recommended that Truman appoint an experienced and capable administrator for the Korean aid program and provide him with long-range instructions. More important, they said, the United States had to withdraw as soon as possible because continued military occupation would embarrass the new Korean government and substantiate Soviet charges of American imperialism.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously, the Army Department had far more confidence than the State Department in South Korea's ability to defend itself. During the orientation of John Muccio, the new American ambassador to Korea,

45. Gilchrist memo, May 19, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 1, pt. 3a, case 1.

46. *New York Times*, May 21, 1948, p. 7; Lawson memo, May 25, 1948, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 1, pt. 3a, case 1; Lawson memo, June 9, 1948, *ibid.*, sec. 5, box 88, case 66; Royall to Marshall, June 23, 1948, *ibid.*, sec. 3, box 21, cases 3-15; Charles E. Saltzman to Lovett, July 30, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1265.

47. Lovett to Royall, June 23, 1948, and July 8, 1948, *ibid.*, pp. 1224-25, 1234-35; in Korea, Joseph E. Jacobs, Hodge's political adviser, also urged delay because he feared withdrawal would "complicate if not jeopardize our hope that [the United Nations Temporary Commission] will give formal approval to new government." Hodge to Bradley, June 17, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, sec. 5, box 88, case 65.

48. Schuyler to Wedemeyer, July 28, 1948, *ibid.*, sec. 1, box 21, cases 16-30.



Truman's military advisers insisted that containment in Korea did not require the presence of American combat forces. Stalin would not order an invasion across the parallel, they argued, because his strategy was subversion and indirect aggression. Moreover, Syngman Rhee, the newly elected president of the ROK, was, "as a result of the Army's substantial effort in training and equipping the South Korean forces, in a strong bargaining position to talk with the North Koreans on unification." In response, Muccio agreed to advocate a greater role for the State Department in supervising Korea's economic recovery.<sup>49</sup>

Truman's diplomatic advisers were reluctant to assume complete responsibility for South Korea's economic rehabilitation "owing to a feeling that Congress did not want State to handle programs of this nature." Draper completely rejected the validity of this explanation. Marshall and his colleagues, he said, were attempting to shun their responsibilities. If State Department indifference persisted, Draper suggested that the Army Department might order the removal of all military equipment from Korea intended for transfer to the constabulary army. American military leaders argued logically that if the State Department did not consider Korea important enough to sustain any interest in its future survival then it would be foolish to leave a substantial military investment in an area destined for Soviet domination.<sup>50</sup>

Truman acted quickly to end this interdepartmental dispute. On August 16, the president instructed the departments involved to decide which agency was best able to manage the Korean rehabilitation program. During subsequent discussions, the Army Department insisted upon the rapid termination of its obligations in Korea. The State Department claimed that it did not possess enough trained personnel to supervise the program and, besides, Congress had indicated its desire to exclude the diplomatic branch from involvement in foreign aid. Paul Hoffman, the ECA director, strongly supported the Army Department's contention that the military should not administer assistance programs,<sup>51</sup> recognizing that the ECA was the only logical candidate to supervise the Korean aid program. He expressed doubts that Congress would "continue to pour money into Korea, which was a rather questionable investment." Nevertheless, he agreed to formulate a specific assistance plan for inclusion in the budget proposal for fiscal 1950 in cooperation with the State Department. Yet, as one Army

49. H. A. B. to Schuyler, Aug. 9, 1948, *ibid.*, sec. 5, box 22, case 31.

50. Schuyler memo, Aug. 9, 1948, *ibid.*

51. Lawton to Truman, Aug. 16, 1948; Truman to Lawton, Aug. 16, 1948, Official File 471, Truman Papers, Truman Library; C. V. R. S. to Schuyler, Aug. 20, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 5, box 22, case 31

Department memorandum revealed, Hoffman was not satisfied and questioned the logic of the entire venture:

The whole problem is one of State Department foreign policy. It has no economic justification. He would not hold out hope that Korea would offer any kind of economic bulwark. He gathers that it has no strategic importance from a military point of view. ECA will look to the State Department for leadership in the program to be carried out. He regards the operation as a holding one—making good on pledges to Korea.

On August 25, Truman ordered the Army Department to transfer its responsibilities to the ECA on January 1, 1949. Hoffman began immediately to recruit personnel and to organize an aid mission to South Korea.<sup>52</sup>

Charles Saltzman, assistant secretary of state for occupied areas, completed work on a draft proposal for aid to Korea in early September. Saltzman's memorandum rejected continued reliance on annual relief appropriations and emphasized instead the advantages of a multi-year program for the development of economic self-sufficiency. The proposed plan provided for American assistance to begin in 1949 and would require congressional approval for \$180 million in economic aid to South Korea during fiscal 1950. Hoffman urged adoption of Saltzman's proposals. Its implementation would permit the United States to end wasteful expenditures on relief and to achieve withdrawal, while fostering genuine economic recovery in Korea. Draper was also pleased with the proposal, believing that the State Department finally had taken a direct role in Korean affairs. But he was doubtful that Congress would approve the appropriation. Lovett agreed and stated flatly that the program was "too rich for my blood." Together with other similar requests, aid to Korea would place an excessive strain on the American economy. Yet Lovett admitted that the United States could not abandon South Korea and he therefore approved Saltzman's draft proposal and promised to work for congressional support.<sup>53</sup>

On August 15, the United States formally transferred political authority to representatives from the ROK. Gen. Douglas MacArthur attended the inauguration ceremonies, declaring in his congratulatory speech that the thirty-eighth parallel "barrier must and will be torn down. Nothing shall prevent the ultimate unity of your people as free men of a free nation."<sup>54</sup>

52. Lawton to Truman, n.d., Official File 471, Truman Papers, Truman Library; Truman to Marshall, Aug. 25, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1288-89; Claxton memo, Sept. 1, 1948, decimal file 895.50 Recovery/9-148.

53. Saltzman memo, Sept. 7, 1948; Lovett to Paul G. Hoffman, Sept. 17, 1948; Hoffman to Lovett, Oct. 1, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1292-97, 1304-5, 1312-13.

54. *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 1948, p. 1; Aug. 15, 1948, sec. 4, p. 8; *Time*, Aug. 23, 1948, p. 24.



The new Korean government experienced incredible difficulties from the start. Serious shortages of food and other commodities produced high inflation; insufficient electric power severely impeded economic recovery. Political grappling between the legislature and Syngman Rhee represented a further complication. Then in September, the North Koreans announced the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and requested Soviet-American military withdrawal. Observers recognized that the ROK could not withstand political and military pressure from the north without sustained American protection.<sup>55</sup>

Political and economic deterioration in South Korea worsened in October when a major rebellion brought the ROK to the verge of total collapse. Near the town of Yösu, a group within the constabulary staged an uprising that spread quickly to nearby counties. More than three thousand individuals joined the rebellion and South Korean military forces restored order only with great difficulty.<sup>56</sup> The administration reacted to news of the rebellion with profound shock and dismay. Although many of the rioters were Communist sympathizers, the favorable popular response exposed the depth of local grievances. Muccio predicted that "if the internal South Korean situation worsens . . . the North Korean Army would intervene under the banner of restoring order and aiding 'democratic' elements of the population." Only continued American military occupation, he concluded, would prevent the complete demise of the ROK. Now suddenly the United States had to consider delaying withdrawal.<sup>57</sup>

In the aftermath of the Yösu Rebellion, Truman's diplomatic advisers strongly opposed fixing a specific date for the completion of withdrawal. Marshall, Lovett, and Saltzman insisted that disengagement

55. Owen T. Jones to Marshall, Sept. 15, 1948, decimal file 895.00/9-1548; Jacobs to Marshall, Aug. 25, 1948, decimal file 895.00/8-2548; *New York Times*, Sept. 1, 1948, p. 7, Sept. 11, 1948, p. 4, and Sept. 25, 1948, p. 16; Kohler to Marshall, Sept. 19, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1306; "Position on Withdrawal of Troops from Korea," Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, no. 19, Oct. 10, 1948, p. 456; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 328; *Time*, Sept. 27, 1948, p. 32; see also Joungwon A. Kim, *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945-1972* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 107-8, 123.

56. John J. Muccio to Marshall, Oct. 28, 1948, *FRUS*, 1958, 8:1317-18; O'Byrne memo, Nov. 15, 1948, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, sec. 5, box 88, case 65; *New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1948, pp. 1, 26, Oct. 25, 1948, p. 12, and Oct. 27, 1948, pp. 9, 26.

57. Muccio to Marshall, Oct. 26, 1948, decimal file 895.01/10-2648; Muccio to Marshall, Nov. 4, 1948, decimal file 895.00/11-448; Muccio to Marshall, Nov. 16, 1948, decimal file 895.00/11-1648; Muccio to Marshall, Nov. 12, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1325-27.

at this time of extreme chaos would be premature and prejudicial to American security interests. Moreover, the United States had to delay withdrawal until the UN extended recognition to the ROK.<sup>58</sup> But Army Department officials were reluctant to authorize another postponement of the withdrawal operation—now code-named Twinborn. Military leaders were anxious to end the occupation because of its drain on the Army Department's limited financial resources. While the JCS was fighting further large reductions in military expenditures, Truman absolutely refused to raise the ceiling on defense spending for fiscal 1950.<sup>59</sup> For the Army Department, the administration's devotion to a balanced budget meant that the United States could not afford to maintain the costly occupation of Korea unless it was vital to American security interests. Nevertheless, the JCS ordered MacArthur to halt disengagement from Korea and to retain one regimental combat team there until the UN formally requested an end to American military occupation.<sup>60</sup>

On December 12, 1948, the UN approved a resolution naming the ROK the only legal government on the peninsula and requested the withdrawal of all foreign troops "as soon as practicable."<sup>61</sup> Less than two weeks later, Undersecretary Draper approached the State Department and requested approval for total military disengagement no later than March 31, 1949. Since the protection of the ROK was not worth a major war, he explained, the American occupation forces would be a liability in the event of military conflict in Asia;<sup>62</sup> political and diplomatic factors reinforced the military justification for withdrawal. On December 30, the Soviet Union announced it had completed withdrawal and called upon the United States to do likewise.

58. Claxton memo, Oct. 29, 1948, decimal file 501BB, Korea/10-2948; Saltzman to Wedemeyer, Nov. 4, 1948, decimal file 501BB Korea/11-448; Lovett to Marshall, Nov. 5, 1948; Saltzman to Wedemeyer, Nov. 9, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1319, 1324.

59. Leahy diary, Nov. 4, 1948, Leahy Diaries 1948-1950, box 6, Leahy Papers; Forrestal memo, Oct. 5, 1948; Forrestal to Marshall, Oct. 31, 1948, in *The Forrestal Diaries*, pp. 498-99, 508-10; Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense," pp. 175-76.

60. JCS to MacArthur, Nov. 15, 1948, RG 218, decimal file 383.21, CCS, Korea (3-19-45), sec. 18; in response, MacArthur informed Washington that although he had delayed withdrawal he did not consider it part of his assigned mission "to secure or to make plans to secure Southern Korea." Department of the Army memo, Jan. 10, 1949, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, 15, sec. 1, box 162, cases 5-16.

61. John Foster Dulles to Marshall, Dec. 12, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1336; "U.N. Recognizes Republic of Korea," Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, no. 19, Dec. 12, 1948, p. 728; *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1948, p. 3.

62. William H. Draper to Saltzman, Dec. 22, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1341-43.



Moscow charged that continued American occupation and plans for economic assistance constituted imperialism and proved the United States sought to exploit Korea. Truman and his advisers understood that delaying withdrawal was risky. The Soviet Union would use America's continued presence in Korea as a propaganda weapon to discredit the ROK and undermine the international prestige of the United States.<sup>63</sup>

And yet a new element emerged to complicate the situation. Communist successes in China convinced other American leaders that the United States had to postpone disengagement from Korea indefinitely. One State Department official argued that, with the loss of China, American abandonment of the ROK would destroy the confidence and morale of all nations in Asia. Perhaps worse, Communist conquest of South Korea would greatly advance the Soviet drive to dominate Japan—"a target of prime importance to world Communism." The United States, he believed, should attempt to create a ring of strong states in Asia capable of halting further Soviet expansion. J. Leighton Stuart, the American ambassador to China, even urged Washington to seize the military and diplomatic initiative in Korea. Some decisive action was imperative if the United States expected to counter the loss of prestige it would suffer with the anticipated fall of Chiang's regime.<sup>64</sup> Butterworth summarized these views in a memorandum to Lovett and recommended an immediate redefinition of American objectives in Korea under NSC 8. In January 1949, Lovett referred the Korean matter to the NSC for a policy reassessment.<sup>65</sup>

At the thirty-sixth meeting of the NSC on March 22, Truman and his advisers began a reappraisal of American policy in Korea. The State Department review of events in Korea during the previous year concluded that, despite American aid and advice, the new Korean government had not developed sufficient military and economic strength to defend itself against the Soviet puppet regime in North Korea. If the United States withdrew abruptly, the report declared, this "disengagement would be interpreted as a betrayal by the U.S. of its friends and allies in the Far East and might contribute substantially to a fundamental realignment of forces in favor of the USSR through-

63. Muccio to Acheson, Jan. 6, 1949, decimal file 895.00/1-649; McGeorge Bundy, ed., *The Pattern of Responsibility* (Boston: Kelley, 1952), p. 287.

64. Bishop to Butterworth, Dec. 17, 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, 8:1337-40; Stuart to Marshall, Dec. 29, 1948, *ibid.*, 7:695.

65. Butterworth to Lovett, Jan. 10, 1949; Saltzman to Draper, Jan. 25, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, pt. 2:942-45; Secretary of State Acheson did not want to even discuss withdrawal. Acheson to Royall, Jan. 25, 1949, Korean War Documents, Background File, box 1, Truman Papers, Truman Library.

out that part of the world." In addition, premature American withdrawal would shatter the confidence of South Korea and thus guarantee the rapid demise of the ROK. A dramatic Communist victory would damage American interests because it would destroy the viability of the UN and force smaller countries to seek an accommodation with the Soviet Union. The study (NSC 8/1) therefore concluded that, despite the uncertain prospects for success, the United States had to continue to provide South Korea with diplomatic support and economic, technical, and military assistance.<sup>66</sup>

NSC 8/1 also acknowledged however that American military withdrawal was necessary since the UN had requested the removal of all foreign troops. Both Muccio in Korea and MacArthur in Japan had concluded that the United States could withdraw safely if the administration satisfied certain conditions. First, Washington had to train, equip, and supply a security force in Korea sufficiently powerful to maintain internal order and deter an open attack from the north. Second, the ECA had to implement a three-year program of technical and economic aid. Finally, the UN had to maintain diplomatic and political support as a boost to South Korea's morale. Such a plan would not preclude the possibility of invasion, the report admitted, but further postponement of total withdrawal would not diminish the risk of attack either. In fact, NSC 8/1 ominously predicted that if the United States delayed departure the "occupation forces remaining in Korea might be either destroyed or obliged to abandon Korea in the event of a major hostile attack, with serious damage to U.S. prestige. . . ."<sup>67</sup>

Truman approved NSC 8/1 on March 23, 1949, with certain significant revisions. In its final form (NSC 8/2) the paper represented a compromise that attempted to accommodate the conflicting desires of both diplomatic and military leaders. The administration assumed a stronger commitment to get congressional approval for a three-year economic aid program for South Korea and military security prior to American withdrawal. Economic strength not only would promote political stability in South Korea, but would also encourage the realization of democratic self-government throughout the Korean peninsula. In addition, the United States would provide enough equipment and arms to maintain a security force of over one-hundred thousand men.<sup>68</sup>

NSC 8/2 set June 30, 1949, as a firm date for the total withdrawal

66. NSC 8/1, Mar. 16, 1949, RG 319, P&O Files, decimal file 091, Korea, sec. 1a.

67. *Ibid.*; see also, Royall to Acheson, Jan. 25, 1949, *ibid.*, box 163.

68. NSC 8/2, Mar. 22, 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 7, pt. 2:969-78.



of American combat forces. The final plan also set specific limits on the size of the army (65,000), coast guard (4,000), and police (35,000). The United States would equip these forces with light weapons; the creation of a Korean navy was explicitly ruled out. Obviously American military leaders wanted to eliminate any potential for South Korea to attempt forcible reunification and thereby ignite a major war. At the same time, NSC 8/2 emphasized that American military withdrawal would in no way lessen the administration's interest in the ROK's future survival.<sup>69</sup> Three months later, the United States removed its last combat forces from the Korean peninsula. The administration's decision to withdraw without a firm guarantee of military protection for South Korea did not constitute an abandonment of the ROK: Truman and his advisers had concluded that containment in Korea did not require an American commitment to military defense any more than it did in Greece and Turkey. Truman's strategy anticipated that containment through economic means would act as a liberating force in Korea. Eventually, the North Koreans would recognize that the ROK possessed a superior political and economic system and clamor for immediate reunification.<sup>70</sup> These expectations were at best overly optimistic and at worst utterly naïve, since a successful rollback of the Soviet sphere depended upon the weakness of the North Korean regime and the development of genuine democracy and economic prosperity in South Korea.

By the spring of 1949, Korea had thus come to assume far greater significance for the administration's overall approach in Asia than previous scholars have acknowledged. Truman and his advisers accepted as valid the fundamental assumption that if the people of Asia were able to exercise freedom of choice, a substantial majority would elect to follow the American model for political and economic development. As a result, national self-determination promised the creation of a series of governments in Asia friendly to the United States and supportive of American policies in international affairs. With limited American assistance, these Asian nations could then develop the ability to defend themselves against the threat of Soviet expansion. The fall of China reinforced the administration's confidence in its strategy. Despite extensive American aid, Chiang K'ai-shek had lost the support of the Chinese people because he rejected reform and refused to satisfy

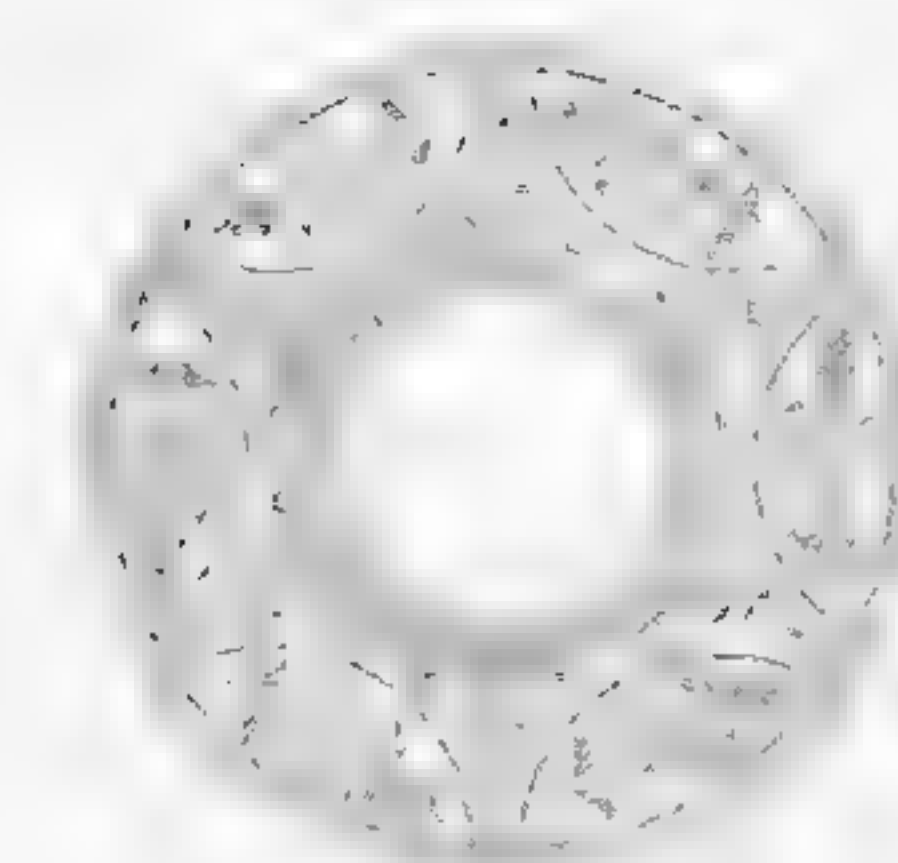
69. Ibid., see also Maddocks to army chief of staff, Mar. 7, 1949; Maddocks to secretary of the army, Mar. 22, 1949, RG 319, P & O Files, decimal file 091, Korca, TS, sec. 1, boxes 1, 163; Robert K. Sawyer and Walter G. Hermes, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAC in Peace and War* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1962), p. 38.

70. Ibid., pp. 15-16; Bunce to James K. Penfield, Jan. 20, 1948, decimal file 895.00/1-2048; Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 330.

popular needs and desires. In Korea, however, the United States had a second chance to prove that its policy of containment through indirect means would succeed. On June 7, 1949, Truman indicated in a message to Congress the importance of the American commitment in Korea when he proclaimed that "the Korean Republic, by demonstrating the success and tenacity of democracy in resisting communism, will stand as a beacon to the people of northern Asia in resisting the control of the communist forces which have overrun them."<sup>71</sup> For Truman, Korea was more than a bulwark of democracy; it was his test case of containment in Asia. When the test finally came on June 25, 1950, Truman and Acheson responded to the Korean crisis with measures that, given the evolution of containment from 1947 to 1949, do not now seem so surprising.

71. Harry S. Truman, Presidential Message to Congress, Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, no. 20, June 19, 1949, p. 781.





## The March to the Yalu: The Perspective from Washington

WILLIAM STUECK

THIS PAPER SEEKS TO ANSWER TWO QUESTIONS: WHY, EARLY IN THE FALL OF 1950, did the United States attempt to unify Korea by ordering American as well as South Korean troops to push north of the thirty-eighth parallel? Then, after the intervention of Chinese Communist combat forces in North Korea in late October, why did the United States, faced with a possible military setback in that area—and even global war—fail to halt its ground units in their advance toward the Yalu River?

Until recently, scholars have based their answers to these questions on a variety of sources: published memoirs, congressional hearings, and interviews with the actors (all of which were written or conducted months, even years, after the event) on the official army histories of the Korean War, and only occasionally on contemporary documents from the executive branch. In the past several years, however, a large

This paper first appeared in *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950*, by William Stueck (copyright 1981 by the University of North Carolina Press), and has been reprinted by permission.



body of such documents has been released to the public by the Departments of State and Defense, the National Security Council (NSC), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Although uncertainty remains on many points, historians are able better than ever before to reconstruct the decision-making process in Washington in the critical months between June and December 1950.<sup>1</sup>

President Truman did not decide to send American ground forces across the thirty-eighth parallel until September 27. Yet that move was in the making long before then. Less than three weeks after the outbreak of hostilities in Korea on June 25, both the State and Defense Departments were discussing possible United Nations (UN) ground action in North Korea. Two events sparked this activity. First, on July 13, CBS reported a statement by South Korean President Syngman Rhee to the effect that North Korean aggression "had obliterated the 38th parallel and that no peace and order could be maintained in Korea as long as the division [of the peninsula] at the 38th parallel remained." In response, an American army spokesman allegedly asserted that U.S. forces had intervened merely to push the invaders north of the thirty-eighth parallel and would "use force if necessary" to halt South Korean troops at that point.<sup>2</sup> Second, on July 12, at a briefing in Tokyo of Gens. J. Lawton Collins and Hoyt Vandenberg, the army and air force chiefs of staff, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the commander of UN forces on the peninsula, expressed confidence that the North Korean advance would be halted and a counteroffensive launched. He also stated his intention to destroy North Korea's forces rather than simply drive them back across the parallel.<sup>3</sup>

By July 15, a debate was raging within the State Department between the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), headed by Paul Nitze, but

1. Memoirs include Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956); Dean G. Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Doubleday, 1964); J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969). Congressional hearings of interest: U. S. Congress, Senate, Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, *Joint Hearings to Conduct an Inquiry into the Military Situation in the Far East*, vols. 3, 5; 82nd Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951). One firsthand account is Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960), pp. 123-51. Among Army histories are Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1961), and James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972). For compilations of documents, see U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950* (hereafter *FRUS*), vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1977).

2. *FRUS*, 7:373.

3. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, p. 107; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, pp. 81-83.

still influenced by its previous director, George F. Kennan, and the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, led by John Allison. Herbert Feis, of the former, urged that the U.S. government publicly disassociate itself from Rhee's statement. Otherwise, he argued, a rift with our allies might develop, the Chinese Communists and Russians might send their own troops into the fighting, and Soviet charges of American aggression in Korea might gain credibility outside the Communist world.<sup>4</sup>

Allison made a stinging reply to this analysis. Perpetuating the division of Korea, he exclaimed, would make "impossible" the implementation of the Security Council resolution of June 27 calling for a restoration of "peace and security in the area." If the United States accepted the status quo ante bellum, it would lose the confidence of South Koreans in its "moral position." "[T]he aggressors" would go "unpunished," thereby encouraging aggression elsewhere. Finally, Allison rejected the claim that America's allies would be put off by a military venture into North Korea. Most of our friends, he believed, agreed that the continued division of Korea was "utterly unrealistic." A diplomatic offensive by the United States could eliminate most allied opposition to such military action. He "most strongly urge[d]" that the Truman administration avoid any public statement committing the United States to halt its troops at the thirty-eighth parallel or implying a willingness to accept a restoration of the status quo as of June 25.<sup>5</sup>

While middle-level State Department officials debated the issue, Collins and Vandenberg returned from the western Pacific and reported on conditions in Korea to President Harry S. Truman. On July 17, the chief executive instructed the NSC to prepare recommendations on what the United States should do once North Korean forces had been pushed back to the parallel. At the same time, the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, a staff organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), launched a study of the matter. Thus, well before UN forces had halted the North Korean advance, governmental machinery in Washington had commenced deliberations on what should be done once the tide of battle turned.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this activity, Secretary of State Dean Acheson was not particularly interested in the question. He cabled John J. Muccio, the American ambassador in South Korea, that U.S. officials must avoid

4. Unfortunately, the memo is not printed in *FRUS* but it is summarized by Allison in his memo to Rusk of July 15 in *FRUS*, 7:393.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 393-95.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 410.



public statements committing their country to a future course of action. To him, it was too early to establish policy to meet circumstances that could not be clearly foreseen.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Acheson's position on the diplomatic front during the summer served to narrow the options available to the United States later on when its military position in Korea improved. In July and again in August, the secretary of state squelched maneuvers by Great Britain and India aimed at early resolution of the conflict in Korea. Both of the overtures in July involved American concessions—Chinese Communist admission to the U.N. and the withdrawal of the Seventh Fleet from the Formosa Strait. The Indian proposal, as it turned out, did not even provide for the simultaneous reestablishment of the thirty-eighth parallel in Korea.<sup>8</sup> Acheson's determination not to reward aggression had merit. Yet his definition of what constituted concessions was overly rigid, and he failed to recognize that exploratory exchanges involving the United States, the Soviet Union, and Communist China might serve a useful purpose even if they failed to bring an early end to the fighting in Korea. This failure of perception became important in late September when the diplomatic process lagged behind military events.

Acheson's position in this case derived from broad assumptions about the Communist world. The Communist victory in China in 1949, coupled with the Soviet Union's explosion of an atomic device, had created tremendous apprehension in Washington. Early in the following year, the secretary of state began arguing publicly that successful negotiations with the Communists required the creation of "situations of strength" for the United States. Soon thereafter, a top secret document—the now famous NSC 68—emerged from the NSC staff. It envisioned at least a threefold increase in American defense spending over the next several years. The North Korean attack merely reinforced the view that the Russians would exploit cases in which they or especially their satellites had the military advantage over local anti-Communist forces. Until the scales tipped in favor of the United States or its allies, it was useless to try and bargain with Moscow. The appropriate course was to move forward rapidly with a major expansion of America's physical power in Korea, at home, and in Europe. In theory, this endeavor aimed to produce conditions in which fruitful negotiations were possible. In fact, its object was circumstances in which the United States could dictate rather than negotiate.

7. Acheson, *Present*, p. 451.

8. For more extensive treatment of these overtures, see Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), pp. 199-202.

Despite Acheson's hard line, he was by no means as extreme as Allison. Although the PPS had argued that the risks of Soviet or Chinese intervention in Korea in response to American troops crossing the thirty-eighth parallel outweighed the advantages to be gained by the unification of Korea, on July 24, Allison advocated throwing caution to the wind:

We should recognize that there is grave danger of conflict with the USSR and the Communist Chinese whatever we do from now on—but I fail to see what advantage we gain by a compromise with clear moral principles and a shirking of our duty to make clear once and for all that aggression does not pay—that he who violates the decent opinions of mankind must take the consequences and that he who takes the sword will perish by the sword. . . . That this may mean war on a global scale is true—the American people should be told and told what it will mean to them. . . . When all legal and moral right is on our side, why should we hesitate?<sup>9</sup>

Had the secretary of state responded to this diatribe he probably would have noted that, despite America's superiority in atomic weapons, the United States was not necessarily militarily superior to the Soviet Union, at least for the short term; that, with global war an increasingly likely prospect, Korea was a poor place to commit large numbers of American troops, not only because of its limited strategic significance to the United States, but because the peninsula's location gave the Soviets a military advantage there; and that American adventurism in Korea might create divisions within the Allied camp that would undermine collective efforts in the event war spread to Europe. In sum, Acheson stood closer to the PPS, which on July 22 concluded the following: "In the unlikely event that there is a complete disintegration of North Korean forces together with a failure of the Kremlin and Communist China to take any action whatever to exert influence in North Korea, United Nations forces acting in pursuance of an additional Security Council resolution, might move into North Korea in order to assist in the establishment of a united and independent

Still, Allison made his mark, partly because he had the support of his immediate superior, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East Dean Rusk. The PPS paper of July 22 conceded that under certain conditions American ground forces might move into North Korea. This position was more flexible than that of Feis. Three days later, the Nitze-headed group gave further ground when it concluded that "the necessity to maintain a realistic balance between our military strength on the one hand and commitments and risks on the other hand, to-

9. *FRUS*, 7:460-61.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 452.



gether with the need for additional information which depends upon political and military developments in the near future, make it impossible to take decisions now regarding our future course of action in Korea."<sup>11</sup> Thus, during July, the PPS moved from an initial position of total opposition to any move across the thirty-eighth parallel, to one of defining narrowly the conditions under which such operations might be undertaken, and finally to a simple wait-and-see attitude. This last posture remained a good distance from that of Allison, but it left open an option that the group had previously sought to eliminate. From late July onward, there was no high-level state department official, with the exception of George Kennan, who consistently took a stand against a UN move into North Korea. And Kennan, who did not enjoy Acheson's confidence, left for the Institute for Advanced Study at the end of August.<sup>12</sup>

The Department of Defense accepted in part the PPS's position in late July. The Pentagon advocated a military effort to unify Korea, but only under two conditions: that the United States mobilize sufficient resources to both "gain its military objectives in Korea" and strengthen "its military position in areas of strategic importance," and that the Soviet Union neither intervened nor initiated general hostilities in Korea. Like the PPS the military regarded Soviet intervention in North Korea—either through the use of its own or Communist Chinese troops—as a major possibility once it became clear that UN forces would not be pushed off the peninsula. Most important, both groups anticipated that such a move would occur before UN forces reached the thirty-eighth parallel.<sup>13</sup>

But the Department of Defense analysis went far beyond State Department papers in outlining the advantages of unifying Korea under a non-Communist regime. The diplomats, including Allison, viewed the advantages essentially in defensive terms; that is, Korea should be united so as to prevent a future North Korean attack across the parallel, to discourage Communist aggression in the future by punishing it in the present, and to avoid both the wrath and demoralization of South Koreans, who yearned for national unity. The PPS also antici-

11. *Ibid.*, p. 472.

12. For Kennan's views, see *ibid.*, pp. 623-28.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 471, 503-4, 506-7. Military leaders—from the JCS in Washington to MacArthur in Tokyo—consistently rejected American involvement in a land war on the Asian mainland. Korea, however, was a kind of twilight zone between the mainland and offshore islands. Because it was connected to the continent on only one side, MacArthur hoped to greatly restrict Soviet and Chinese assistance to North Korea through intensive bombing. See Collins, *War in Peacetime*, p. 82, and Francis H. Heller, ed., *The Korean War: A 25-Year Perspective* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), p. 185.

pated public and congressional pressure for a "final" solution in Korea.<sup>14</sup> Military planners, however, viewed the unification of the peninsula in a broader light. They anticipated that such a "... [p]enetration of the Soviet orbit . . . would disturb the strategic complex which the USSR is organizing between its own Far Eastern territories and the contiguous areas. Manchuria, the pivot of this complex outside the USSR, would lose its captive status, for a free and strong Korea could provide an outlet for Manchuria's resources and could also provide non-communist contact with the people there and in North China."<sup>15</sup> Such circumstances might lead the Communist Chinese to reassess their "dependent" relationship with Moscow. It would also boost the morale of anti-Communist forces throughout Asia. Thus total victory in Korea would help to reverse "the dangerous strategic trend in the Far East of the past twelve months."<sup>16</sup>

This analysis fit into the pattern of military thinking on China going back to 1947. Since that time, a serious division had existed between the JCS and the State Department as to the extent to which the United States should seek to prevent Communist domination of that country. Following Gen. George C. Marshall's failure during 1946 to resolve peacefully the differences between the Communists and the Nationalists, military leaders in Washington had pushed for increased support to Chiang K'ai-shek in the form of American officers to advise Nationalist commanders in tactical field operations. The State Department, now led by Marshall, demurred, arguing that such action would not have a decisive effect, that it would commit the United States irrevocably to the Nationalist cause, and that China simply was not of sufficient strategic importance—given the limits of American capabilities—to warrant such a commitment. A major assumption was that the Communists would probably be little more successful than the Nationalists in uniting and ruling China. This underestimation of Communist capabilities, which persisted after 1947, was to be important in shaping American policy toward Korea in the fall of 1950. For our analysis, however, it is enough to note that the JCS had been frustrated for years in their policy preferences regarding China, and that now, with the opportunity presented by war in Korea, they were anxious to undo at least some of the perceived damage to American interests resulting from past State Department domination of the policy-making process.<sup>17</sup>

14. *FRUS*, 7:471-72. This consideration probably made the Policy Planning Staff less aggressive than it otherwise might have been in the interdepartmental rift.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 506.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 508.

17. Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation*, chap. 2.



Yet another factor inclining the JCS toward an aggressive Korea policy was the towering presence of MacArthur as field commander of UN forces. The aging general was a rabid "Asia-firster" who deeply resented America's slighting of the western Pacific area after World War II. A supreme egoist, he sometimes had difficulty distinguishing between himself and the Almighty. As a would-be poet of the American fleet in the Pacific noted in 1944, one day the Lord was even likely to "hear a deep voice say, 'Move over God, it's Mac.'" <sup>18</sup> Whatever his relationship to the deity, there can be little doubt that he saw in the outbreak of war in Korea an opportunity to reverse the timid Asian policy of the United States. "To hell with the concept of business as usual," he declared to Collins and Vandenberg in mid-July, "it is how you play your poor hands rather than your good ones which counts in the long run." <sup>19</sup>

Doubtless, MacArthur held an exalted position with the JCS. He had received his first commission in the U.S. Army in 1903, twelve years before the JCS's chairman, Omar Bradley. He became army chief of staff in 1930, eleven years before Bradley received his first star. On the eve of war in 1941, he came out of retirement to become commander of U.S. forces in the western Pacific. During the next four years, he served brilliantly in the fight against Japan. At war's end, he took on the huge task of commander of Allied occupation forces in the defeated island-nation. Most observers felt that he made the transition from field commander to military statesman with ease.

There were other reasons as well for MacArthur's influence on the JCS. First, he was the commander in the field and military tradition dictated that his views on Korea be given the utmost consideration. Second, his presence was Olympian. As one retired general recently recalled, "He could charm the birds off the trees." <sup>20</sup> The outbreak of war in Korea insured that his audience in Tokyo would include, more often than ever before, top personages from Washington. His persuasive powers, formidable as they often were at a distance, were all the more so in person. In August, he even talked the highly dubious General Collins and Adm. Forrest Sherman, chief of naval operations, into permitting him to launch a major counteroffensive at the port of Inch'ŏn, despite prohibitive natural obstacles. Third, he was almost universally regarded as an expert on Asia, although

18. See "Doug's Communique," written by an unidentified commander aboard Adm. William Halsey's flagship in the Pacific, in the Harry S. Truman Papers, President's Secretary's Files, box 138, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo.

19. Collins, *War in Peacetime*, p. 82.

20. Interview with Gen. Thomas Timberman, Aug. 13, 1974.

he spoke no Asian languages and had traveled little on the mainland. <sup>21</sup>

It would be a mistake, nonetheless, to view MacArthur's influence as pivotal on the issue of an American military campaign in North Korea. True, certain of the views presented by the Far Eastern commander to Collins and Vandenberg during their Tokyo visit of July did reappear in the Defense Department paper at the end of the month: American bombing near the northern border of Korea was seen as a possible means of preventing a major Soviet or Chinese intervention. Also, a rapid American build-up and counteroffensive would tend to discourage such intervention. Furthermore, this last belief, and the feeling that unification of the country under non-Communist rule would tend to draw Communist China away from Russia, may have rested on MacArthur's conception of the Chinese mentality, which in August he summarized as follows: "it is the pattern of Oriental psychology to respect and follow aggressive, resolute and dynamic leadership—to quickly turn on a leadership characterized by timidity or vacillation." <sup>22</sup> Yet on broad issues it is likely that MacArthur merely strengthened pre-existing inclinations. For instance, he did not modify the Europe-first orientation of the JCS; he did, on the other hand, play upon their long-standing discontent with American policy in Asia. In midsummer his influence was secondary; from late October onward, however, it would become more central.

## II

During August, State Department officials and the NSC staff developed and refined the position papers of late July, but did little to alter basic arguments. On September 1, a paper drafted in the State Department emerged for consideration by the NSC. Eight days later it came forth essentially intact. On September 11, the president approved the document as NSC 81. <sup>23</sup>

As of late July, decision makers thought it too early to render final judgments on crossing the thirty-eighth parallel. The key questions remained: Would the Soviet Union and/or Communist China intervene directly in North Korea? Would America's friends in the UN support major non-Communist ground operations north of the line?

Regarding the second question, State Department officials were increasingly confident that the answer was yes. They felt this matter particularly important because Allied unity, especially if expressed

21. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, pp. 149-53; William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1890-1964* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), pp. 573-77.

22. U. S. Congress, *Military Situation in the Far East*, pp. 3479-80.

23. *FRUS*, 7:671-79, 685-93, 712-21.



in concrete form in a resolution by the UN, might discourage China and Russia from intervening militarily in North Korea.<sup>24</sup>

Yet the State Department, as well as the JCS, continued to regard Soviet action as likely, provided the Kremlin felt it "would not involve a substantial risk of global war."<sup>25</sup> Since Soviet movement into North Korea after American troops had entered that territory would inevitably result in a clash between the superpowers—which could easily escalate into World War III—Russia would probably act before UN ground forces reached the parallel. Chinese intervention in North Korea was possible, though less likely, as the Soviet Union regarded that area as its own sphere of influence.

NSC 81 anticipated that MacArthur would be given authority to move ground forces beyond the parallel, "provided that at the time of such operations there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea."<sup>26</sup> American officials hoped that North Korean forces would be so thoroughly destroyed in the south that only Republic of Korea troops would be needed for operations in the north. This would not necessarily reduce the likelihood of Russian or Chinese intervention, but it would lessen the risk that such intervention would lead to general war.

The prospects for outside intervention, however, could be diminished by avoiding ground operations near the Soviet or Chinese borders: "It should be the policy not to include any non-Korean units in any U.N. ground forces which may be used in the north-eastern province [of North Korea] bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border."<sup>27</sup> This aspect of NSC 81 represented the only significant alteration of the State Department draft of September 1. The earlier paper had stated simply that "[i]n no circumstances should . . . [non-Korean] forces be used" in those regions.<sup>28</sup> Undoubtedly military officials made the change. In view of subsequent events, it is clear that military leaders regarded the phrase "it should be the policy" as less absolute than "in no circumstances." But State Department planners may not have grasped this until later. The change reflected a somewhat lesser concern on the part of military men about Soviet and Chinese sensitivity to American activity near their borders.<sup>29</sup>

24. Ibid., pp. 656, 667-69, 679-83.

25. Ibid., p. 672.

26. Ibid., p. 716.

27. Ibid., pp. 714-15.

28. Ibid., pp. 687-88.

29. This point is further demonstrated in the State-Defense conflict between

### III

NSC 81 made no provision for a diplomatic approach to the Soviet Union. The paper merely stated that if the Kremlin initiated diplomatic action to end the conflict while hostilities continued below the thirty-eighth parallel, the United States "should be prepared to negotiate a settlement favorable to us." Such a settlement should "not leave the aggressor in an advantageous position that would invite a repetition of the aggression," nor should it "undermine the authority and strength of the United Nations."<sup>30</sup>

With the exception of Kennan, no official advocated direct American overtures to Russia.<sup>31</sup> In late August, the PPS did devise a plan for the peaceful unification of the peninsula, but it was to be advanced only in the event that the Kremlin indicated a willingness, "before the tide of battle . . . turned . . . to negotiate a settlement involving the withdrawal of the North Koreans to the 38[th] parallel." In brief, the plan went like this: North Korean forces would retreat to positions north of the thirty-eighth parallel, while American troops advanced to the thirty-sixth parallel and their South Korean counterparts to the thirty-eighth. Then the UN Commission would move into the North to supervise the demobilization and disarmament of Communist forces. The Commission would proceed to conduct elections to provide northern representation in the government of the Republic of Korea (ROK). Upon the request of the commission, South Korean constabulary units could enter North Korea to assist in this process.<sup>32</sup>

While no one suggested that this plan serve as a framework for a direct initiative to Moscow, John Paton Davies, the China expert on the PPS, and John K. Emmerson of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs did favor a more subtle maneuver. They wanted to inform India of the proposal under the assumption that from New Delhi it would "reach Peiping's [*sic*] ears," and eventually fall into the hands of the Kremlin. This, they reasoned, "would irritate the Russians, promote the cleavage [presumably between Moscow and Peking], and might possibly intrigue the Chinese Communists."<sup>33</sup>

Rusk rejected the plan. He argued that the Korean issue was "primarily a concern for" the Security Council and UN members who

mid-August and mid-September over the bombing of Rashin (see *ibid.*, pp. 721-22). For evidence of a distaste among military leaders as far back as July for the prospect of halting American forces at the narrow neck, see *ibid.*, p. 503.

30. Ibid., p. 714.

31. For Kennan's view, see *ibid.*, p. 627.

32. Ibid., pp. 615-16.

33. Ibid., p. 616n.



currently supported the collective action on the peninsula. Implementation of the plan would commit the United States to a particular approach to Korea's unification prior to its clearance with other friendly nations. Such a commitment would "tend to create . . . future complications" abroad and, since it had not been established as "a Government position," within the executive branch at home as well. In any event, "the existing military situation in Korea and the position of both Moscow and Peiping" made consideration of the plan outside the Security Council premature. He conceded, nevertheless, that the substance of the proposals for a settlement of the Korean problem had much merit and should "be kept on ice for possible future use."<sup>34</sup>

It is doubtful that Rusk spoke only for himself, that he rejected the Davies-Emmerson idea without first approaching Acheson.<sup>35</sup> Thus the response reveals much about top-level State Department attitudes. It reflects the significance accorded the maintenance of unity within the non-Communist camp. More broadly, it suggests once again the disinclination of Acheson to deal with the leading Communist powers in anything but an adversary relationship. To him, complex maneuvers with the Russians and the Chinese were likely only to result in confusion and division in the Allied camp. They were best avoided, therefore, or at least postponed until it was clear that other alternatives were less satisfactory. If he thought in depth about the circumstances under which an American diplomatic initiative would be worthwhile—and there is no evidence that he did—he probably felt it would be in response to an unambiguous threat by the Soviet Union and/or Communist China, following a reversal of the military balance in South Korea, that they would enter the North if UN forces crossed the thirty-eighth parallel. Given that Korea was a poor place for the United States to engage in military activities against either of those nations since global war was not desirable and the unification of Korea was, negotiations in the face of such a threat would be the least unattractive option. Naturally, however, he hoped this situation would not arise.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 709.

35. I base this judgment on two things: first, the style of the Rusk memo ("It is believed . . .," "It is suggested . . .") suggests that the views of others were being taken into account; second, Rusk was a cautious man. He undoubtedly knew of the close relationship between Acheson and Nitze and of Nitze's high regard for Davies. Thus he probably would have regarded independent action on his part in this case as endangering his own position with the secretary of state. This view of the personalities involved is based on interviews with Nitze, Jan. 9, 1975, Philip Jessup, June 6, 1972, Niles Bond, June 30, 1977, and Rusk, July 24, 1972.

#### IV

During the second half of September, Acheson's hope appeared to be on the brink of fulfillment. Early on September 15 (Korea time) the American Tenth Corps, of just under seventy-thousand men, backed by massive air and naval support, landed at Inch'ŏn, some twenty miles from Seoul, on the west coast. The American units met little resistance. Their advance was rapid, their losses slight. Within eleven days they had seized control of the South Korean capital and linked up with elements of the eighth Army, which on September 23 had burst out of the Pusan perimeter. North Korean forces were now in a headlong and often disorderly retreat toward the thirty-eighth parallel. By the end of the month, UN forces approached that boundary. At the beginning of October, South Korean troops crossed into the North. A week later their American counterparts followed. North Korea's military machine, which less than three months earlier had been close to dominating the entire peninsula, was now in rout and threatened with total extinction. At the same time, neither the Soviet Union nor China made a definite move to intervene in the fighting.

Even in the face of unimpeachable evidence that plans in Washington for crossing the thirty-eighth parallel were far advanced prior to mid-September, it is difficult to deny the Inch'ŏn operation's impact on future events. For one thing, the counteroffensive represented a great personal victory for MacArthur. The JCS had maintained serious doubts about the enterprise right up until its date of implementation. When it succeeded brilliantly, therefore, military leaders in Washington became less inclined than ever before to question MacArthur's judgment.

This fact was to become critical from mid-October onward. The Inch'ŏn landing had a more immediate impact, however, on international politics. With the alteration of the balance of forces on the peninsula, the Soviet Union sent out strong signals that it was interested in negotiations. In New York, Russian diplomats pursued what was for them a most conciliatory course. On September 21, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky delivered a comparatively sober speech at the opening session of the General Assembly. Rather than centering on the U.S. Taiwan policy and Communist China's admission to the United Nations—as his subordinates had done in August—Vyshinsky expressed concern regarding the war in Korea, relations among the five permanent members of the Security Council, and the trend toward rearmament in Western Europe. The speech seemed to be more than the usual Soviet propaganda tirade. James Reston observed that Soviet diplomats had abandoned their "stone faces" in private to become "elaborately jovial." The Soviet delegates to the United Nations not



only attended a reception for Acheson at the Waldorf-Astoria, they actually "appeared to be enjoying themselves." They talked openly about the necessity of ending the Korean War.<sup>36</sup>

At the beginning of October, more explicit signals appeared. On September 29, Great Britain and seven other nations introduced a resolution, partially drafted by the United States, to the General Assembly. The resolution included four recommendations, the most important of which called for "appropriate steps" to "insure conditions of stability throughout Korea" and for UN-supervised elections over the entire peninsula to establish "a unified, independent, and democratic government" for the country.<sup>37</sup>

Russia responded with a resolution of its own. Although this countermeasure was unsatisfactory to the United States in several respects, it did call for UN-supervised elections throughout the peninsula, a major alteration of the Kremlin's past position. And Vyshinsky expressed a desire to negotiate on the resolutions through a subcommittee of the First Committee.<sup>38</sup>

Vyshinsky also approved private talks on Korea between a low-level Soviet diplomat and the Norwegian representatives to the United Nations. In these discussions, the Russian mentioned the possibility of disarming the North Koreans and permitting a UN commission to conduct elections. When, on October 7, American troops entered the North, however, the Soviets broke off the contact.<sup>39</sup>

The United States did not flatly reject negotiations. American leaders feared, nevertheless, that these would place them under irresistible pressure from allies and neutrals to halt UN ground operations at the thirty-eighth parallel at least temporarily.<sup>40</sup> The success at Inch'ŏn had given friendly forces tremendous momentum. An opportunity appeared to be at hand for total military victory at little cost in time and resources. To halt UN troops in the midst of their rapid march north would hurt morale, especially within South Korea's contingents, and give North Korean soldiers, some thirty thousand of which had eluded entrapment in the South, time to regroup. Thus, although Washington did not openly reject diplomacy, it did shy away from procedures that might compromise its military advantage on the peninsula. Had the American counteroffensive been less dramatic in its

36. *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1950, pp. 6-7; *ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1950, pp. 1, 8.

37. Leland Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1956), pp. 129, 223. For the text of the resolution, see *FRUS*, 7:826-28.

38. *New York Times*, Oct. 3, 1950, p. 1.

39. *FRUS*, 7:878, 880, 897, 907-10, 922.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 771-72.

impact, had the UN advance been slower and more costly in casualties, the Truman administration might well have regarded negotiations as more attractive.

## V

Yet the landing on Inch'ŏn influenced American policy only because leaders in Washington held certain beliefs. These included the conviction that any show of uncertainty would produce increased intransigence in Moscow and Peking, that negotiations with Communists were not generally productive, and were often harmful, and that, for the present, the Soviet Union and Communist China wished to avoid a direct military confrontation with the United States.

The view that Moscow and Peking wanted to avert hostilities with the United States led, in turn, to the conclusion that, if either of the top Communist powers were going to intervene directly in North Korea, it would do so well before UN forces reached the thirty-eighth parallel. This presupposed that if major Chinese or Russian units moved into North Korea, American troops would not, and that Moscow and Peking recognized this. Thus, when no Chinese or Russian soldiers entered North Korea immediately following the Inch'ŏn landing—and the Soviets assumed a relatively conciliatory posture in New York—the way seemed clear for a UN military offensive to unify the peninsula.

The fallacies in this thinking are clear. First, Washington overestimated Moscow's ability to read American intentions. Since the Kremlin was uncertain as to how the United States would react to Soviet intervention in North Korea, such intervention involved major risks. Then, Washington misread the failure of Russia or China to send troops into Korea as a confession of helplessness to influence events on the peninsula. On the one hand, top American officials failed to grasp Russia's cautiousness regarding its own role in Korea, and on the other, they miscalculated Russia's ability and willingness to play the Chinese card at a later date.

Perceptions of Peking's intentions were influenced by reports from China indicating that the Mao regime would avoid direct involvement. Information flowing into Washington was often contradictory. On September 5, and again a week later, James R. Wilkinson, the American consul general at Hong Kong, reported to Washington that Chinese sources on the mainland indicated that the government planned to send forces into North Korea if American troops entered that area. On September 23, the American embassy at Taipei transmitted a report from the Nationalist Chinese defense minister, which was "partially confirmed by [an] outside source," that Communist China would send two-hundred and fifty thousand troops into Korea. Earlier intelli



gence reports from both London and Tokyo disclosed that since July large numbers of soldiers had been moving from southern and central China into Manchuria.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, on September 20, Loy Henderson, the American ambassador to India, relayed to Washington the assessment of K. M. Pannikar, his Indian counterpart in Peking. Pannikar stated that the Chinese Communists had "shown no undue interest [in Korea] beyond expression[s] of sympathy. Even that has been notably slackened during the last two weeks. In such circumstances direct participation of China in Korean fighting seems beyond [the] range of possibility unless of course a world war starts as a result of UN forces passing beyond the 38th parallel and [the] Soviet Union deciding directly to intervene."<sup>42</sup> Additional evidence supporting this conclusion included the failure of the Chinese to take "even elementary precaution against air raids of their cities," which, given the recent experience of North Korean cities, were likely to accompany a Sino-American clash. Also, aside from the "strengthening of defenses in Manchuria," there were no apparent military preparations in progress. In the following days, Wilkinson presented information that reinforced Pannikar's view. Three reports from the mainland indicated that, because of the Peking regime's desire for entry into the UN and its preoccupation with internal reconstruction, it would provide only limited and indirect support to North Korea.<sup>43</sup>

It is easy to see why the reports from Pannikar were more persuasive than those from Taipei. The Nationalist government, Washington surmised, hoped to further alienate the United States from the mainland Communist government by presenting evidence of that regime's aggressive intent. The Indian ambassador and his government were also likely to overstate the prospects of Communist Chinese intervention, albeit for a different reason: The Indians generally sought to restrain the United States from action that might result in an expanded conflict. Hence, when Pannikar concluded that Peking would not send forces across the Yalu, State Department officials took special notice.

Pannikar's analysis also gained special credence because it fit prevailing State Department attitudes regarding Communist China. Acheson's condescension toward that nation appeared most baldly in an interview with CBS commentator Eric Sevareid on September 10:

41. Ibid., pp. 563, 698, 724-25, 765n; Far Eastern Command, *Intelligence Summaries* (hereafter *IS*), Aug. 26, 1950, Records of the Occupation of Japan, National Records Center, Suitland, Md.

42. *FRUS*, 7:742.

43. Ibid., pp. 765, 768.

Now, I give the people of Peiping credit for being intelligent enough to see what is happening to them. Why they should want to further their own dismemberment and destruction by getting at cross purposes with all the free nations of the world who are inherently their friends and have always been friends of the Chinese as against this imperialism coming down from the Soviet Union I cannot see. And since there is nothing in it for them, I don't see why they should yield to what is undoubtedly pressures from the Communist movement to get into the Korean row."

This remark had at least a kernel of truth. Russian influence in Manchuria was considerable and, in all likelihood, the Sino-Soviet relationship was less than smooth. One intelligence report of late August indicated that the Chinese were much irritated by the Soviet attempt to direct their activities and embroil them in the Korean conflict.<sup>44</sup> Surely the Peking regime was not anxious to confront the United States at a time when its tasks at home—both political and economic—were so burdensome. Yet Acheson's suggestion that "free nations" were the friends of the Chinese and that, deep down, the Communists knew this, was arrogant and naïve. It revealed a basic insensitivity to the depth of Communist resentment toward the United States for its past and present support of the Nationalist Chinese. It reflected a failure to grasp the deep-seated fear and apprehension in Peking regarding American intentions in Asia. Finally, it demonstrated an underestimation of Communist China's determination—even in the face of severe domestic problems—to prevent the forces of a hostile great power from marching to its border.

Despite these misperceptions, reports from China from the end of September onward produced considerable unease in Washington. On September 27, the British reported that Pannikar had altered his views and now believed China "had decided on a more aggressive policy" and would intervene indirectly in Korea on an expanded scale. Two days later, Alan Kirk, the American ambassador in Moscow, reported word from the Dutch foreign office that its chargé in Peking believed the Communists were actively considering military intervention if American troops crossed the thirty-eighth parallel. At the beginning of October, the American embassy in the Netherlands repeated this warning from the Dutch diplomat in China. From Hong Kong, Wilkinson sent a partial text of a September 30 speech by Chou En-lai stating that "the Chinese people absolutely will not tolerate foreign aggression nor will they supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by imperialists." Finally, on October 3, the State Department

44. U. S. Department of State, *State Department Bulletin*, Sept. 18, 1950, pp. 460-64.

45. *IS*, Aug. 26, 1950.



received word of Pannikar's midnight meeting with Chou in which the latter stated that China would intervene if the United States sent its troops into the North.<sup>46</sup>

Livingston Merchant, Rusk's top assistant, asserted at a meeting in Under Secretary of State James Webb's office that the report should be treated "with extreme seriousness" and not be discounted as a bluff. U. Alexis Johnson, the deputy director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, suggested that consideration be given to using only South Korean troops "for the subjugation of North Korea." At the China desk, O. Edmund Clubb made somewhat similar proposals.<sup>47</sup>

Yet these counsels of caution were rejected. "Hesitation and timidity," Acheson argued on October 4, would involve "greater risk [than a] firm and courageous" stand.<sup>48</sup> This statement reveals that, mixed with his condescension, there was a measure of fear as well. To him, China's flaunting of traditional standards of diplomatic behavior—the most outstanding examples of which were the mistreatment in the fall of 1949 of American diplomat Angus Ward and the confiscation in January 1950 of American consular property in Peking—was childish and inexcusable. It was also dangerous. In 1969 the former secretary of state recalled: "In fact, I was always a conservative. I sought to meet the Soviet menace and help create some order out of the chaos of the world. I was seeking stability and never had much use for revolution. As a friend once said, we had plenty of chaos, but not enough to make a world."<sup>49</sup> A prerequisite to an orderly world was the acceptance by its national units of certain rules of conduct. If the United States bent in the face of improper behavior, the prospects for stability and order would diminish. To flinch when the Chinese threatened or remonstrated, therefore, was to Acheson most distasteful to contemplate.

In any event, by early October the momentum for sending American troops across the thirty-eighth parallel was nearly irresistible. On September 27, Washington had sent orders to MacArthur authorizing an American campaign in the North.<sup>50</sup> Two days later, the eight-power resolution approving such a campaign had gone before the General Assembly. In the midst of a heated congressional election campaign, a substantial majority of both editorial writers and those questioned in a national poll favored a military effort to unify Korea.<sup>51</sup> Short of

46. *FRUS*, 7:784, 821-22, 848, 852, 858.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 848, 849, 864-66.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 868-69.

49. "Mr. Acheson Answers Some Questions," *New York Times Book Review*, Oct. 12, 1969, p. 2.

50. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, pp. 182-83.

51. U. S. Department of State, Office of Public Affairs, *Monthly Survey of*

clear evidence that Soviet or Chinese troops had crossed into North Korea, or a direct threat of Soviet entry, there was no stopping the northward march of the UN forces.<sup>52</sup>

## VI

The prospects for productive negotiations on Korea remained uncertain. Perhaps Russia sought merely to undermine American resolve, or to enhance its own image as a force for peace in the world. Nevertheless, there was much in the early fall to cause disquiet in the Kremlin. The United States was more determined than ever to move toward a peace treaty with Japan. Congress and the president finally appeared willing to accept a level of military spending commensurate with American objectives abroad. West German rearmament appeared imminent. The balance of forces in Korea had shifted greatly to the disadvantage of the Communists. Direct Soviet intervention could reverse this development, at least temporarily, but it might also provoke the unleashing of American military-industrial power against the Soviet homeland. Large-scale Chinese Communist intervention in Korea could probably turn the tide on the peninsula, but it was unpalatable to Peking, which had serious domestic problems to contend with. Moreover, in the long run, China's assumption of the major burdens in Korea might weaken Soviet influence over the Communist movement in Asia and elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> Finally, if former Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev was correct when he stated in his memoirs that the Kremlin did not anticipate the sharp American response to the North

*American Opinion*, September and October 1950, George Elsey Papers, box 81, Truman Library; Public Opinion News Service, Oct. 15, 1950; *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1950, p. 5.

52. It might be argued that a direct threat in public of Chinese Communist intervention would have led to a halt of American forces. I doubt it, unless the threat had come well before October. By then the momentum, combined with the antagonism and contempt for Communist China, were such as to require more concrete evidence of Peking's intentions. A threat from Moscow, however, probably would have been taken more seriously, first because Russia was militarily stronger than China and second because a Soviet-American confrontation in Korea was likely to escalate into a similar collision in Europe.

53. For an analysis of possible Soviet calculations in September, see Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967* (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp. 508-11, 527-31. Ulam argues that the Soviet resolution of October 2 was not aimed toward achieving a settlement in Korea, because it called for an immediate withdrawal of foreign forces from the peninsula. Such a proposal, Ulam observes, was obviously unacceptable to the United States. This is correct, but the Russians did show a willingness to negotiate on the differences between their resolution and that of Great Britain and to permit nationwide supervision of elections by representatives of the United States.



Korean attack in June, it may be that in the fall Soviet leaders were uncertain what Washington's response would be to Chinese intervention in Korea. They may even have feared direct American retaliation against Russia.<sup>54</sup>

Ultimately, these considerations may not have been sufficient to make Moscow and Peking accept a Korean settlement satisfactory to the Truman administration, but a secretary of state intent on keeping options open should have made an effort to find out if this was the case. Simultaneous overtures to the Russians and the Chinese might even have revealed divisions within the Communist camp.

Domestic politics offered no major deterrent to talks, as Americans traditionally approved negotiations even when they stood little chance of success.<sup>55</sup> Of those questioned in a national poll in mid-October, 52 percent felt that a meeting between Truman and Stalin to seek an end to their countries' differences was a "good idea." Only 35 percent viewed it as a "poor idea."<sup>56</sup>

This response, however, said nothing about the political risk of halting American troops at the thirty-eighth parallel while discussions took place. Certainly such a course would have stimulated serious dissent in Congress and the press. Nevertheless, had the United States moved toward negotiations well before October, their conclusion—or at least a sense of their prospects—might have been attained before American troops were ready to enter North Korea. And public dissent might have been reduced had the Truman administration, from mid-August onward, publicly delineated the dangers of a military campaign in the North rather than emphasized the need for political unity in Korea. In any event, military operations in the northern half of the peninsula—especially if they involved no American ground forces—did not necessarily preclude East-West discussions regarding Korea's future.

But Acheson was more intent on negotiations to solidify the Western alliance against Communist expansion than with talks on the

54. Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970) 1:367-70.

55. For instance, in February 1950 a national survey was taken on the question of whether or not to develop a hydrogen bomb. Seventy-seven percent of those polled responded in the affirmative, while only 17 percent answered in the negative. But 48 percent believed that the United States should try again to work out an agreement with Russia to control the atomic bomb before an attempt was made to make a hydrogen bomb. Forty-five percent disagreed. Only 11 percent thought negotiations with the Russians would be successful. Seventy percent thought they would be unsuccessful (Public Opinion News Service, press release, Feb. 8, 1950).

56. *Ibid.*, Oct. 20, 1950.

Korean situation. As Adam Ulam has observed, the secretary of state, ever suspicious of Soviet motives and none too sensitive to subtle signals from Moscow—where officials sought to convey a desire to bargain while obscuring Russian weakness—perceived neither the strength of the American position in the fall of 1950 nor the limits to which that position could be enhanced.<sup>57</sup> As a result of this failure, the United States embarked on a dangerous course before exploring prospects for an advantageous settlement without a successful American military venture in North Korea.

That venture was particularly ill-advised in view of Allied and neutral opinion. Although the British continued to support American policy, Peking's threat of intervention made them extremely uneasy.<sup>58</sup> In the General Assembly, India maneuvered furiously to reconcile the eight-power and Soviet resolutions on Korea. Sir Benegal Rau, the head of the Indian delegation, proposed the creation of a special subcommittee to seek a compromise. The move coincided with an effort by Secretary-General Trygve Lie to negotiate an agreement on a unified Korea. Lie hoped that P'yŏngyang would disband its forces and allow a UN commission into North Korea to conduct an election that would serve as a basis for unification. If North Korea rejected this plan, Lie was willing to support a UN effort to consolidate the territory militarily as a prelude to political unification.<sup>59</sup>

Ambassador Austin objected to the Indian proposal claiming that it would delay action on the British resolution, thereby "permitting the aggressor to prolong his activities." In an attempt to meet Austin's objections, Rau agreed that the projected subcommittee would have to submit any proposals before October 6. The Soviet Union reacted favorably to India's initiative.<sup>60</sup> As in July and August, however, Indian efforts failed. On October 4, the First Committee defeated India's plan by a vote of thirty-two to twenty-four with three abstentions.<sup>61</sup>

Although the eight-power resolution eventually passed the General Assembly by a forty-seven to five margin, the support for the Indian

57. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, p. 510.

58. Homes to Acheson, Oct. 4, 1950, *FRUS*, 7:867; Allison memo, Oct. 4, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 868-69; Rusk memo, Oct. 6, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 893-94; Lord Tedder to Bradley, Oct. 5, 1950, Record Group (hereafter RG) 218, decimal file 383.21, Korea, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

59. Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 344-45.

60. Austin's arguments are printed in United Nations, General Assembly, *Official Records*, First Committee, 350th meeting, Oct. 3, 1950, pp. 55-56.

61. *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1950, p. 1.



maneuver in the First Committee suggests widespread unease with America's Korean policy. India's opposition to an immediate American move across the thirty-eighth parallel was especially important, first because of that nation's stature in Asia, and second because New Delhi's relations with Peking were under increasing strain over the latter's pressure on Tibet. The fall of 1950, therefore, was an especially opportune time for the United States to build a more constructive relationship with India.<sup>62</sup>

At the very least, Washington should have halted American troops at the parallel and pursued negotiations in New York. Even permitting South Korean soldiers to move into the North presented problems. In all likelihood, they could not have destroyed enemy forces or pacified the territory. A South Korean campaign, therefore, raised the specter of indecisive fighting on the peninsula over an interminable period. Yet had the United States halted South Korean units at the parallel in October 1950, considerable resentment would have arisen, both within the Rhee government and throughout the populace. American soldiers, in fact, might have found themselves forcefully restraining their South Korean counterparts. However imperfect these choices may have been, they were far less dangerous in their implications than a possible Sino-American clash in Korea. Such a clash would raise doubts in Western Europe about the prudence of the United States and weaken relations with India; most important, it would produce a major drain on American resources in an area of secondary strategic importance and, for the short term, solidify Peking's allegiance to Moscow.

It was silly to argue that a failure to punish the Communist world for the North Korean attack would encourage future aggression. Certainly the American response to the June crisis, both locally and worldwide, was enough to discourage Communist adventurism generally—or even again in Korea. In sum, by October the United States had profited much internationally from its action in Korea. Now, in trying to gain a little more, it was about to incur a serious deficit.

## VII

Before moving on to the fateful military campaign in North Korea, some discussion on the role of personalities is in order. Would the outcome in early October have been different had someone other than Rusk been the officer in charge of American policy toward East Asia, or had someone other than Allison been director of the Office of

62. For documents on Indian and American exchanges regarding the Tibetan matter, see *FRUS*, vol. 6. In later October, Communist China invaded Tibet.

Northeast Asian Affairs? It is clear that these two men were among the least likely to support a cautious policy regarding military activities in North Korea. It is clear that Merchant and Clubb, just below Rusk, and Johnson, just below Allison, were more deeply disturbed by the risks entailed in an American advance beyond the thirty-eighth parallel.

What if, in the spring of 1950, W. Walton Butterworth had been retained as assistant secretary of state for the Far East? Butterworth was a Princeton graduate of the same class as Kennan. Like Kennan, who was a good friend, he was a career foreign service officer. Unlike Rusk, Butterworth was independently wealthy, a man who had no financial need to keep his job. Though a team player, he was a tough, forceful personality in the intricate game of bureaucratic politics. More than Rusk, he was a cool-headed realist, suspicious of narrow moral and legal arguments. His views on China were moderate. Whereas Rusk had begun his government career in the military during World War II and had maintained close contacts with army officials afterward, Butterworth had no such background and generally held military men in contempt. Although he could often see both sides of an issue, Butterworth rarely had difficulty making up his mind, whereas decisiveness was never one of Rusk's outstanding qualities. Finally, Clubb had served under Butterworth in China in 1946 and 1947, and the latter had great esteem for his subordinate's knowledge of and judgment in Chinese affairs.<sup>63</sup>

Would Butterworth have given greater weight than did Rusk to Clubb's analysis of early October—as well as to Johnson's and Merchant's apprehensions? Would he have conveyed them more vigorously to Acheson? Perhaps so, but to what degree? It would have taken a strong man indeed to forcefully resist the momentous pressures that existed at that time. Surely Butterworth's position would have been strengthened had Johnson been in Allison's place. Then the two men with the greatest responsibility for reporting to Acheson on Korea might have been of one mind, and the secretary of state might have listened, as he was not one to ignore strong advice from below. Yet given his attitudes toward China and the likelihood that, if the Truman administration halted the American advance at the thirty-eighth parallel, a politically risky confrontation with the victorious MacArthur would ensue, it remains doubtful that the evidence available in early October could have been brought to bear upon Acheson forcefully

63. This comparison of Rusk and Butterworth is based primarily on interviews with Rusk, Butterworth (Nov. 16, 1971), Clubb (Mar. 16, 1977), Niles Bond, and Gen. Thomas Timberman, but also on O. Edmund Clubb, *The Witness and I* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 87-88, and George F. Kennan, *Memories, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 152.



enough to change his mind. The most that can be said is that a Butterworth-Johnson combination in the State Department from the summer onward might have led to somewhat different circumstances in early October, and thus to a different policy outcome.

It can be said with greater assurance that, in late September, personalities had an important impact on the framing of a new directive for MacArthur. As we have seen, planners in Washington anticipated that no American troops would be used in the provinces bordering on Russia and China, but that the State Department was less flexible on the issue than the Defense Department.<sup>64</sup> The orders sent to MacArthur on September 27 stated that: "Under no circumstances . . . will your forces cross the Manchurian or USSR borders of Korea, and, as a matter of policy, no non-Korean ground forces will be used in the northeast provinces bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border."<sup>65</sup> The distinction between action in Manchuria or Russia and action in Korea's border provinces implied that the prohibition against the second was not as firm as that against the first. Military men, in fact, understood that a difference existed between an order and a statement of policy, although the precise nature of that difference was uncertain.<sup>66</sup> In any event, State Department officials spotted the discrepancy in the JCS draft of the new instructions and took up the matter with the Pentagon.<sup>67</sup>

At this point, a recent change in top personnel in the Defense Department became significant. On September 21, General Marshall became secretary of defense, replacing the recently fired Louis Johnson, whose relations with the State Department had been at best frigid, at worst explosive. In contrast, Marshall had outstanding relations with the diplomats. During the first six months of his stewardship of the State Department, Acheson had been his top assistant. The secretary of state was a great admirer of the general, as were the president and virtually all top State Department officials. With Johnson at the helm in the Pentagon, Acheson had had no peer in influence at the White House on foreign policy matters. With Marshall's accession, he now had one. While Acheson did not hesitate to initiate and perpetuate disagreements with a Johnson-led Defense Department, when Marshall took over, the secretary of state became less combative. So did his subordinates.

As Paul Nitze later recalled, had Johnson responded to the State

64. See pp. 200-201.

65. *FRUS*, 7:781.

66. Interviews with Gen. Matthew Ridgway, Nov. 26, 1971, and J. Lawton Collins, July 21, 1974.

67. Interview with Nitze.

Department inquiry regarding MacArthur's new orders, the diplomats probably would have resisted pressure to retain an element of flexibility on American troop involvement in the extreme northern provinces of Korea. When Marshall responded, however, they simply suppressed their doubts.<sup>68</sup> Certainly timing was important, as the issue arose at the peak of optimism in Washington following the Inch'ŏn counter-offensive and when Acheson was in New York, preoccupied with talks on the NATO alliance and with proceedings at the UN. It appears, nonetheless, that Marshall's presence in Washington, which three years earlier had been crucial in America's avoidance of a deepening clash with the Communists in China, now served to increase significantly the prospects of such confrontation in Korea. But this would become apparent only in the weeks after President Truman's October 15 meeting with MacArthur at Wake Island.

#### VIII

During the week following the crossing of the thirty-eighth parallel by American troops, the Truman administration presented a confident face to the public. In its early stages, the American advance into North Korea met with little resistance. Beneath the surface, however, Washington officials showed serious concern about the possibility of Communist Chinese intervention. Although threats of such action from Peking did not prevent American ground operations in North Korea, they did result in the dispatch of further orders to the Far Eastern Command. On October 9, in an expansion of the orders of September 27, the JCS told MacArthur that "in the event of an open or covert employment anywhere in Korea of major Chinese Communist units, without prior announcement, you should continue the action as long as, in your judgment, action by forces now under your control offers a reasonable chance of success." The Far Eastern commander was to "obtain authorization from Washington prior to taking any military action against objectives in Chinese territory."<sup>69</sup>

Between October 8 and 14, Communist China repeated its warnings in domestic newspapers, and intelligence reports indicated that Chinese troops were massing in Manchuria near the Yalu River. Still, an army analysis concluded that they were unlikely to cross into Korea on a major scale. Without Soviet air and naval support, Chinese intervention might not be as decisive as earlier, and Soviet aid would increase Russian influence in Manchuria. Moreover, an attack on American forces might lead to countermeasures that could threaten Mao's regime.<sup>70</sup>

68. *Ibid.*

69. JCS to MacArthur, Oct. 9, 1950, *FRUS*, 7:915.

70. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, p. 201.



The intelligence branch of the Far Eastern Command held similar views, asserting that Peking and Moscow had probably ruled out "further expensive investment in support of a lost cause."<sup>71</sup> Thus fears in Washington were not adequate to alter the American course in Korea.

They may have provided some impetus, however, for the president's trip to the western Pacific to talk to MacArthur. Yet domestic politics were the primary motive for Truman's pilgrimage to Wake Island. Surely it was not intended as a major policy-making event. Acheson was not informed in advance of Truman's decision to go, and he neither attended nor desired to do so.<sup>72</sup> As former presidential aid Charles Murphy recalled, the trip was the idea of the White House staff, which viewed it as good public relations for the Democratic party on election eve.<sup>73</sup>

What is important about the meeting is that MacArthur left it with a greater sense of freedom than when he had arrived. In his talks with the president, Harriman, Rusk, General Bradley, and others, the Far Eastern commander exuded confidence about Korea.<sup>74</sup> He asserted that it was unlikely that the Communist Chinese would intervene, and that, if they did, UN forces would easily prevail. The latter claim was especially important, as later on it would add to Washington's deliberations the question of Peking's capabilities rather than merely its intentions. In a private meeting, MacArthur even apologized to the commander in chief for the Veterans of Foreign Wars letter.<sup>75</sup> When, over a decade later, Truman recalled that MacArthur "kissed my ass" at the meeting, he erred only in a literal sense.<sup>76</sup> Acheson described the mood of the presidential party upon its return to the United States as "full of optimism and confidence in the General."<sup>77</sup> And MacArthur returned to Tokyo equally self-assured of his own authority to do as he pleased in Korea. On October 17, he ordered UN soldiers to move 50 to 100 miles into the provinces bordering Manchuria and the Soviet Union. A week later he removed all restrictions on the use of non-Korean troops near the northern boundary.<sup>78</sup>

Apparently the JCS did not take notice of the first move. After the second, however, they wired MacArthur, stating that although he

71. *IS*, Oct. 14, 1950, Federal Records Center.

72. Acheson, *Present*, p. 456.

73. Oral history interview with Charles Murphy, Truman Library.

74. *FRUS*, 7:948-60.

75. Truman, *Years*, p. 416.

76. Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking* (New York: Berkeley Publishing Corp., 1974), p. 313.

77. Acheson, *Present*, p. 457.

78. Collins, *War in Peacetime*, p. 177; Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, p. 218.

"undoubtedly had sound reasons for issuing these instructions they would like to be informed of them."<sup>79</sup> The Far Eastern commander replied that "military necessity" dictated his move. South Korean forces, he asserted, were inadequate to hold North Korea's border regions. He had legal justification for his action, he continued, because the JCS had stated that their directive of September 27 was not final. Moreover, the restrictions on non-Korean troops had been stated as a matter of policy rather than an order. A communiqué from Marshall two days later had loosened even that restraint. It read: "We want you to feel unhampered tactically and strategically to proceed north of the 38th parallel." MacArthur concluded by saying that the "entire subject was covered in my conference at Wake Island."<sup>80</sup>

The JCS, as General Collins later observed, "at least tacitly accepted MacArthur's defense of his order by making no move to countermand it."<sup>81</sup> On October 26, however, President Truman stated publicly that it was his understanding that only Korean troops would approach the Yalu. MacArthur was kind enough to clarify the matter for the commander in chief—and for the American people—with a declaration that the UN mission was simply "to clear Korea."<sup>82</sup>

The Wake Island conference was not totally responsible for MacArthur's moves. The wording of the instructions sent him on September 27 was at least partially to blame. Yet the minutes of MacArthur's meeting with Truman, Bradley, Rusk, and other leading administration officials indicate that the "Proconsul of the East" implied that non-Korean troops would be permitted into the extreme northern provinces. When questioned on the feasibility of using Indian soldiers for occupation along the Soviet and Chinese borders, he stated the following: "It would be indefensible from a military point of view. I am going to put South Korean troops up there. They will be the buffer. The other troops will be pulled back south of a line from 20 miles north of Pyongyang to Hamhung."<sup>83</sup> Assuming that the wording of the minutes is precise, MacArthur's statement that non-Korean troops would be "pulled back" to the narrow neck indicated that he initially intended to use them north of that line. Yet, no one questioned him on it. The point may have passed over the heads of the Washington officials present. It is likely, however, that MacArthur regarded this episode as additional justification for moving American troops into the border provinces.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Marshall to MacArthur, Sept. 29, 1950, *FRUS*, 7:826.

81. *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1950, p. 1.

82. *Ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1950, p. 1.

83. *FRUS*, 7:959.



MacArthur's action was significant for three reasons. First, his orders of October 17 and 24 committed non-Korean forces to a continuing offensive beyond the most convenient point for defensive operations between the thirty-eighth parallel and the Yalu. Henceforth supply lines became seriously overextended, thereby rendering American troops increasingly vulnerable to counterattack. Second, the continuing northward march of American troops could not help but raise anxieties in Peking, and increase the likelihood of a clash between Chinese and American forces. Third, it insured that the first contact between UN ground troops and the Chinese, if it occurred, would take place after American soldiers had advanced beyond the narrow neck. Therefore, it would be more difficult to defuse an impending crisis because to hold at that line would involve a retreat of American forces rather than just the halting of an advance. Given the prevailing state of mind in Washington regarding the danger of showing timidity in the face of Communist pressure, neither prospect was attractive, but the first was far less so than the second. Thus the move by American forces beyond the narrow neck increased the chances of both a major Sino-American confrontation and a military setback for the United States.

The role of MacArthur is an issue that historians will never resolve with certainty. Surely most other military men in his place would have requested permission from Washington before sending American troops beyond the narrow neck, and in such circumstances, the JCS surely would have sought the views of the State Department.<sup>84</sup> It is less certain, however, what decision would have been reached. The JCS had long feared a stalemate in Korea. Their worries remained, even after the UN counteroffensive of mid-September. Enemy soldiers who had escaped across the thirty-eighth parallel, combined with the organized but not fully trained North Korean units that had been held back from the June offensive, could in time become a substantial force. It was important, therefore, to destroy the entire North Korean Army quickly. The South Koreans alone could not accomplish this.

The position of the Defense Department during September indicates that it would have favored American ground activity north of the narrow neck, if a need arose. Intelligence reports and Chou's warning in early October did increase unease within the military regarding the likelihood of Chinese intervention. Yet MacArthur's statement at Wake Island that there was little chance of a Chinese move into North Korea and that, if such a move did occur, UN forces would still emerge victorious, was most reassuring. We must remember that

the Far Eastern commander's influence in Washington was at its peak after the landing at Inch'ŏn, not only because of its success, but because MacArthur had stuck to his plan in the face of serious doubts among the JCS. As historian David Rees has noted, that triumph was one of "imagination and intuition," rather than "logic and science."<sup>85</sup> For this very reason, military leaders later hesitated to question MacArthur's plans, facts to the contrary notwithstanding.<sup>86</sup> In sum, before October 25, there was far too little evidence of a possible Chinese intervention to have led the JCS to oppose his actions, even had he requested permission from Washington beforehand.

It is also unlikely that the State Department would have opposed him. The diplomats, after all, were not immune to MacArthur's influence, nor were most of them inclined toward caution. They may have hedged a week later, however, at granting him total freedom for ground operations within North Korea, and had State Department doubts led to significant delay in approving MacArthur's order, it might never have been issued. For on October 25, South Korean forces made initial contact with Chinese soldiers. Had this incident occurred and been confirmed in Washington prior to MacArthur's announcement that all Korea was open to American troops, it would have been easier politically, both at home and abroad, for the Truman administration to stop them well short of the Manchurian border. The move could then have been explained as being grounded in previous orders, rather than in direct response to Chinese pressure. From late October onward, therefore, it is possible—even probable—that MacArthur had a major influence on the actions (or inactions) of Washington. His role was important both because he had tremendous personal prestige after the Inch'ŏn landing and because he took liberties with his instructions that most others would have avoided. Still, his influence was greatly enhanced by prevailing attitudes in Washington regarding China.

## IX

On October 25 at Onjong, less than forty miles south of the Manchurian border, the ROK's First Division met stiff resistance from Chinese soldiers. Many of these "volunteers"—as Peking labeled them—were killed and some were captured. In the following days, South Korean and American troops made extensive contact with Chinese units in both the eastern and western sectors.<sup>87</sup>

85. David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964).

86. Collins, *War in Peacetime*, p. 141.

87. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, pp. 675-708.

84. Interviews with Ridgway and Collins.



In Tokyo, strong anxieties emerged. On October 28, a Far Eastern Command intelligence summary estimated that 316,000 "regular Chinese ground forces," in addition to 274,000 security troops, were in Manchuria. All of the regulars, the report continued, "could be employed in the Korean War . . . [and] the bulk of [them] . . . are now in positions along the Yalu River at numerous crossing sites."<sup>88</sup> These figures conflicted sharply with those cited by MacArthur at Wake Island.<sup>89</sup> Yet G-2 chief, Gen. Charles A. Willoughby, argued ". . . that the auspicious time for intervention has long since passed; it is difficult to believe that such a move, if planned, would have been postponed to a time when remnant North Korean forces have been reduced to a low point of effectiveness."<sup>90</sup>

In Washington, General Bradley also expressed considerable puzzlement. Peking's actions were "halfway between" the possibilities of large-scale and marginal involvement in Korea. General Collins viewed the reported crossings of the Yalu as an effort to save face after the public declaration by Chou En-lai of support for North Korea. He conceded, however, that, despite China's lack of air power and limited artillery strength, its forces could seriously threaten U.S. troops. In early November, therefore, the JCS set aside plans for cutting back reinforcements to Korea.<sup>91</sup>

In the State Department, Clubb conceded that the intervention could "not be conceived as other than direct." It was "unlikely," moreover, that the involvement would be so limited as to present a danger that the Chinese would be "promptly bloodied and thrown out by [a] force that they themselves have consistently characterized as 'a paper tiger.'" Chinese action probably had been coordinated with the Soviet Union, he observed, and might well be the first step in a broadening of the conflict to areas beyond Korea.<sup>92</sup> On November 3, Edward Barnett, the assistant secretary of state for public affairs, insisted that Chinese Communist propaganda alone suggested a massive intervention in Korea.<sup>93</sup> Even Wilkinson in Hong Kong, who throughout October had belittled the chances of large-scale Chinese involvement on the peninsula, was worried.<sup>94</sup> Yet no one proposed a halt to

88. *IS*, Oct. 28, 1950, Federal Records Center.

89. MacArthur's figures at Wake were 300,000 troops in Manchuria, 100,000 to 125,000 along the Yalu, only 50,000 to 60,000 of which could be moved into Korea.

90. Quoted in Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, pp. 233-34.

91. Maj. Gen. C. V. R. Schuyler to Maj. Gen. Robinson E. Duff, Oct. 31, 1950, in *ibid.*, pp. 234, 237-39.

92. Clubb to Rusk, Nov. 1, 1950, *FRUS*, 7:1023-25.

93. Barrett to Rusk, Nov. 3, 1950, *ibid.*, p. 1030.

94. Wilkinson to Acheson, Nov. 3, 1950, *ibid.*, pp. 1034-35.

the UN advance. Despite Clubb's fears, he continued to hope that "a sound drubbing could be administered to Communist Chinese forces."

It was not until November 7 that Washington officials gave serious consideration to altering MacArthur's mission. On the previous day, MacArthur, in response to a denial of his request for permission to bomb the Yalu bridges, had wired the JCS that "men and material in large force are pouring across all bridges over the Yalu from Manchuria. This movement not only jeopardizes but threatens the ultimate destruction of the forces under my command."<sup>95</sup>

In response to this estimate, President Truman gave MacArthur the authority to bomb the Korean side of the bridges. Simultaneously, Clubb and Davies drew up detailed presentations on American options. Both agreed that Communist China might "be on the rampage." Both feared that a show of weakness would reinforce Chinese aggressiveness. Clubb noted that "Communists frequently adopt a threatening posture with the cold-blooded purpose of so frightening their enemies that the latter will surrender without a fight."<sup>96</sup> Both men advocated a combination of moderation and firmness. Davies wanted mobilization at home, negotiations with the Chinese, and abstention from any air attacks on Manchuria. Clubb emphasized the need to build up friendly forces in Korea with contingents from nations other than the United States and South Korea. He regarded the maintenance of a collective front in Korea as all important. Although he did not explicitly propose an end to any UN military advance, he did state that "this should be a period of some slowing up of military operations to permit political estimates and discussions with our allies, to the end that, in our haste to win a battle, we shall not lose the war."<sup>97</sup> He was not optimistic regarding the possibilities for fruitful negotiations with the Communist powers, but he felt talks should be explored anyway, both with China and Russia.<sup>98</sup> He even suggested that the United States might dangle before Soviet eyes the prospect of discussions on Germany.

On November 8, the Central Intelligence Agency presented the strongest case to date in favor of halting the UN advance in North Korea. (Actually, UN forces had temporarily stopped their forward movement, both because of Chinese resistance and logistical problems.) In a paper subscribed to by the intelligence branches of both the State Department and the armed services, the CIA concluded that combined Chinese and North Korean forces in Korea had the capacity

95. *Ibid.*, p. 1058n.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 1090.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 1091.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 1078-85, 1087-93.



to force their enemy to withdraw to "defensive positions farther south." Furthermore, China could probably make available 350,000 additional troops "for sustained ground operations in Korea . . . within 30 to 60 days." If the military situation in North Korea were stabilized, however, the Chinese might "well consider that, with advantageous terrain and the onset of winter, their forces now in Korea are sufficient to accomplish their immediate purposes."<sup>99</sup> The policy proposal implicit in this analysis was that UN forces should seek to establish a defensive position in North Korea.

On the same day, the JCS informed MacArthur that the National Security Council would meet on November 9 to discuss a possible alteration of his mission. They also prepared an option paper for presentation at that meeting. It outlined three alternatives: (1) a withdrawal of UN forces; (2) the establishment of a defensive line at the present locations of UN troops; and (3) a forward movement of those troops. The first was "totally unacceptable" from the standpoint of America's world-wide prestige. The second "might be a temporary expedient pending clarification of the military and political problems raised by Chinese intervention. . . ." The third might "require some augmentation of military strength in Korea even if the Chinese Communist scale of effort is not materially increased." The military leaders concluded that the State Department should seek a political settlement to the Korean situation, but that MacArthur's mission should not, for the present, be changed.<sup>100</sup>

These recommendations served as the basis for the NSC meeting of November 9. All of those present seemed to favor negotiations with China. Acheson introduced the possibility of establishing a ten-mile demilitarized zone on both sides of the Yalu. This idea originated with the thought that the Chinese simply wanted a cordon sanitaire on their border. Apparently, the secretary of state met no opposition. It was agreed that the United States should seek diplomatic contacts with Peking.

Yet no one proposed a halt—even temporarily—to offensive operations in North Korea to avoid initiating large-scale Sino-American hostilities. Why? Here the evidence is less than conclusive. Clearly there remained some hope that a quick military victory could be attained. No one could be certain about this until UN forces moved northward and engaged the enemy. The greater the delay, the more troops and supplies the Chinese could move across the Yalu. As long as a favorable military decision remained a prospect, therefore, none

of MacArthur's superiors was prepared to alter his plans for an end-the-war offensive.<sup>101</sup>

Personalities as well as common attitudes toward China were decisive. Only hours before the NSC meeting, some purple prose had arrived in Washington in MacArthur's name. "It would be fatal," he declared, "to weaken the fundamental and basic policy of the United Nations to destroy all resisting armed forces in Korea and bring that country into a united and free nation." Now that he could use his air power throughout Korea, he continued, he could "deny reinforcements coming across the Yalu in sufficient strength to prevent the destruction of those forces . . . arrayed against me in Korea." He projected an offensive "on or about November 15," with the purpose of "driving to the border and securing all of North Korea." Any lesser move would "completely destroy the morale of my forces. . . ." It would also "condemn us to an indefinite retention of our military forces along difficult defense lines in North Korea and unquestionably arouse such resentment among the South Koreans that their forces would collapse or might even turn against us." The idea that the Chinese might restrain themselves from moving southward if left unmolested, he concluded, was "wishful thinking at the very worst."<sup>102</sup>

MacArthur went on to draw an analogy between the British desire to give the Chinese a small strip of North Korea and their appeasement of Nazi Germany twelve years earlier. "To give up any portion of North Korea to the aggression of the Chinese Communists," he warned, "would be the greatest defeat of the free world in modern times." He recommended ". . . with all the earnestness that I possess that there be no weakening at this crucial moment and that we press on to complete victory which I believe can be achieved if our determination and indomitable will do not desert us."<sup>103</sup>

MacArthur was not alone in his views; Acheson and the JCS had many of the same fears. They feared that a hint of timidity would further embolden China, and they sought to avoid an interminable commitment of American troops to Korea. The balance of military forces on the peninsula, however, was far more unsettling to them than to MacArthur. Intelligence reports already suggested that the Chinese build-up south of the Yalu might be too much for UN units to overcome—and Bradley viewed the bombing of the Yalu bridges as unlikely to stop the flow of Chinese soldiers into North Korea. Moreover, Washington officials were deeply concerned about the

99. Ibid., pp. 1102-3.

100. Ibid., pp. 1117-21.

101. Ibid., p. 1205; Acheson, *Present*, p. 467.

102. *FRUS*, 7:1108.

103. Ibid., p. 1110.



impact of a Sino-American confrontation on the European theater. Great Britain and France both worried that expanded American commitments in Asia would compromise commitments to NATO. MacArthur cared little about allied sentiments, or about American interests outside Asia. Nor was he apprehensive about a Sino-American clash in Korea.<sup>104</sup>

Had a general with less self-assurance and less prestige been in Tokyo at the time, Washington probably would at least have postponed a UN advance. In contrast to circumstances five weeks earlier, leaders in Washington, by the second week of November, had sufficient evidence of large-scale Chinese involvement in Korea to accept a cautious course. Yet in the face of MacArthur's assurances, they could not overcome their own strong distaste for and fear of Communist China and face reality. In this crisis, MacArthur simply brought out the worst in them rather than the best.

In fairness to MacArthur, he undoubtedly assumed that massive Chinese intervention in Korea would force Truman to order direct American action against the mainland.<sup>105</sup> Later events showed that this was not the case, but prior to December, Washington officials had not reached a decision on the matter, much less communicated one to their field commander.

On the other hand, had MacArthur been informed that under no circumstances would the United States retaliate directly against mainland China, it is uncertain that he would have altered his course in Korea. As a man prone to overestimate the strength of his own forces and greatly confident in his ability to grasp the "Oriental mentality," such news from his superiors back home might not have altered his determination to resume the military offensive. Surely he would have protested strongly any timidity in dealing with Peking. Worse still, the protest might have been public. Had he been ordered to halt short of the Yalu, it is even likely that he would have launched a public debate—and no one in the administration welcomed that. On November 7, after all, the Democrats had suffered substantial losses to the Republicans in an off-year election. Especially prominent in the GOP campaign that fall were attacks on the alleged weakness of Truman's policy in Asia. Acheson was often singled out for criticism by opposition politicians. After election day, Democrats blamed the secretary of state personally for the setback. Under such circumstances, not even

104. Truman, *Years*, p. 379.

105. MacArthur's most recent biographer, William Manchester, is correct on this point, but not on much else regarding the November crisis (see *American Caesar*, pp. 590-610).

a man with Acheson's backbone would relish an open confrontation with "the sorcerer of Inchon."<sup>106</sup>

Yet apprehension on the domestic political front was merely one of several influences on the administration. It carried weight because of the uncertainty in all circles regarding Chinese capabilities and intentions—and because in these circumstances such factors as concern for American credibility, military tradition, and personalities came into play.

## X

In the two weeks after the NSC met on November 9, the State Department moved on several fronts with regard to Korea. First, Acheson sought to establish contact with Peking with the aim of probing Chinese Communist intentions and possibly negotiating on Korea. Initially, the secretary of state made overtures through Sweden, which had relations with the Mao regime. That approach led nowhere, but on November 16 the State Department received a report from New Delhi that the Communist Chinese delegation assigned to discuss the Taiwan issue before the Security Council had been granted extensive authority to talk about Korea, both inside and outside the United Nations. Pannikar was the source, however, and he was not even fully trusted by the Indians. He stated that the delegation was scheduled to arrive in New York on November 19; it did not actually do so until five days later, the same day that MacArthur launched his end-the-war offensive.<sup>107</sup>

On November 20, a Polish delegate to the UN leaked alleged Chinese peace proposals to the press. They included a withdrawal of Chinese troops from Korea in return for the creation of a North Korean-controlled buffer zone below the Yalu, and withdrawal of American recognition and aid to Nationalist China. These terms however, were far from acceptable to the United States. They sparked no new diplomatic moves in Washington.<sup>108</sup>

The second front for American maneuver was the public arena. There Washington sought to reassure Peking that the United States had no aggressive designs on China. On November 15, Acheson and Rusk spoke to this effect before a national conference on foreign policy held at the State Department.<sup>109</sup> At a press conference on the

106. Edward Barnett to F. H. Russell, Nov. 13, 1950, Elsey Papers, box 92, Truman Library; Acheson, *Present*, p. 468.

107. *FRUS*, 7:112-1n, 1141-42, 1167-68.

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 1197-98.

109. Department of State, *State Department Bulletin*, Nov. 27, 1950, p. 853; *ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1950, p. 889.



following day, President Truman stated that the United States "never at any time entertained any intention to carry hostilities into China."<sup>110</sup>

In truth, the United States was actively considering sending its planes into Manchuria in pursuit of Chinese aircraft, which were attacking UN forces in North Korea. Only the strong objections of America's European allies prevented this.<sup>111</sup> This fact reveals the framework for American moves on the third front, the UN. The State Department regarded unity in the non-Communist camp as crucial. The mustering of allied support for the American position would strengthen the United States politically—and perhaps militarily—in the event the conflict broadened. It was also hoped that it would discourage the Chinese from large-scale involvement in Korea. On November 10, the United States and five other nations presented a resolution to the Security Council calling on China "to refrain from assisting or encouraging the North Korean authorities" and to withdraw its troops from the peninsula. At the same time, it requested that the UN Commission on Korea "assist in the settlement of any problems" of concern to China and the Soviet Union in areas along the Korean border.<sup>112</sup>

The United States backed away from an initial inclination to bring the resolution to an early vote—which surely would spark a Soviet veto. From November 13 onward, the State Department became increasingly preoccupied with the idea of establishing a buffer zone along the Yalu River. This preoccupation grew out of pressures from Great Britain and France and a continuing concern about Chinese intentions and capabilities. After November 7, Chinese troops had broken off contact with UN forces, but American diplomats remained deeply concerned. Peking did not appear anxious to negotiate, and reports from the mainland through Brussels and The Hague provided little assurance that the Chinese would melt away in the face of a UN offensive.<sup>113</sup> In the meantime, friendly units in North Korea remained precariously split, with the Eighth Army in the west over fifty miles north of P'yŏngyang and the Tenth Corps widely dispersed far to the east. General Willoughby of Far Eastern Intelligence expressed particular concern about a Chinese build-up on the northern and western rims of Tenth Corps positions.<sup>114</sup>

On November 17, John Paton Davies of the PPS finally proposed a

110. *Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1950* (Washington, D.C., GPO, 1950), p. 1171.

111. *FRUS*, 7:1151, 1156-57, 1159-60, 1161-62.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 1127.

113. *Ibid.*, pp. 1138-40, 1147, 1151-53, 1161-62.

114. *IS*, Nov. 15, 1950, Federal Records Center; Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, pp. 263-64.

halt to UN offensive operations. "The bulk of the evidence," he argued, pointed "to the probability that the Kremlin and Peiping are committed at least to holding the northern fringe of Korea—and, that, against our present force they have the military capability of doing so. . . ." In such circumstances, the United States was unlikely "to outdo the enemy short of pressing phase by phase to the ultimate action: initiating atomic warfare." The most attractive option, he concluded, was to declare the termination of major military operations and seek the establishment of a demilitarized zone south of the Yalu. This course would force Peking and Moscow "to bear the onus for initiating clearly aggressive action" and, therefore, would "probably give them pause."<sup>115</sup>

How widespread such thinking was in the State Department remains uncertain. If officials other than Davies expounded similar views, documents that prove it have yet to surface. On the other hand, General Bolté of the Pentagon had information that "certain elements" in the diplomatic agency were pressing for a halt to offensive operations by UN forces. A good chance existed, he thought, that the view would be put forth at an upcoming State-Defense meeting.<sup>116</sup>

The meeting took place on November 21, but no one from the State Department made such a proposal. Discussion centered on possible methods of reassuring the Chinese of America's limited aims, while at the same time giving MacArthur freedom of action within North Korea. The proceedings were a pathetic display of powerful men desperately seeking to avert disaster without provoking the wrath of a subordinate six thousand miles away. The best they could come up with was a plan for UN forces to move back from the Yalu after enemy resistance ceased, with South Korean troops holding the high land dominating the approaches to the river and other units falling back in reserve. On November 24, the JCS dispatched this proposal to MacArthur as a mere suggestion. Predictably, he demurred. He had won the battle in Washington hands down; now, on the battlefield, he would not be so lucky. Four days later, as Communist Chinese troops counterattacked viciously in the frigid and barren terrain of northern Korea, he conceded despondently that the UN "faced an entirely new war."<sup>117</sup>

Communications between the State and Defense Departments were exceedingly good at this time, and it is reasonable to assume that Acheson at least sensed the Pentagon's views on Korea. Certainly

115. *FRUS*, 7:1181-83.

116. Bolté to Collins, Nov. 20, 1950, RG 218, National Archives.

117. *FRUS*, 7:1204-8, 1222-24, 1234-33.



military leaders were concerned about Chinese power and designs, but MacArthur's expressions of confidence deterred them from halting the UN advance.<sup>118</sup> Bolté, who was the last major military figure from Washington to visit Japan and Korea, had been most impressed by MacArthur's confidence and determination. In a private meeting in Tokyo, the Far Eastern commander had exclaimed, "Bolté, we've got 'em!"<sup>119</sup> Upon his return to Washington, Bolté took the lead in opposing any meddling with MacArthur's directives. UN forces, he believed, could under "circumstances now prevailing" hold any position in North Korea. The chances for localizing the conflict would improve if Communist forces were driven from the peninsula. A show of strength by the UN would deter further aggression, weakness would have the opposite effect. "History," he concluded, "has proved that negotiating with Communists is as fruitless as it is repulsive." He urged the JCS to oppose any suggestion by the secretary of state to alter MacArthur's orders.<sup>120</sup>

With a Johnson-led defense establishment, Acheson might have chosen confrontation, but with Marshall in charge, he preferred conciliation. Surely the secretary of state harbored many of the same feelings toward the Chinese as did Bolté, but without a willful commander in the field, prestigious leaders in the Pentagon, and a volatile political climate nationwide, Acheson's choices in November 1950 might well have been different. Had they been so, the president probably would have taken his advice and Marshall would have conceded gracefully. Yet in the prevailing circumstances of doubt and fear, a strong, often arrogant man chose to follow rather than to lead, and he would regret it for the rest of his life.

# XI

It is impossible to determine with any assurance if, by mid-November, a Sino-American confrontation could have been averted. Since 1946, Chinese Communist hostility toward the United States had grown steadily. Revolutionary ideology contributed to this development, but at several points in the half-decade after World War II, Mao and his cohorts demonstrated more flexibility in their attitude toward the United States than American decision makers showed toward them. Washington's persistent support of the Nationalist government would have provoked antagonism among Chiang's opponents no matter

118. On November 17, for instance, MacArthur told Muccio that the Chinese had at most 30,000 soldiers in Korea (ibid., pp. 1174-75).

119. Interview with Bolté, Oct. 22, 1973.

120. Bolté to Collins, Nov. 20, 1950, RG 218, National Archives.

what their world view. With UN forces positioned vulnerably in North Korea in the fall of 1950, it is entirely possible that Peking would have launched a major offensive even if Truman had halted MacArthur's advance.

Yet much can be said for the argument that, short of the American march toward the Yalu that started on November 24, the Chinese would have avoided a major clash with the United States. As Davies pointed out, responding belligerently to an approach of unfriendly forces to one's borders was quite different from attacking stationary units many miles from the international boundary. Moreover, Mao's hold at home was not totally secure. Hostilities with the United States in Korea were likely to spark American-supported attacks on the mainland from Taiwan. Certainly a confrontation on the peninsula would retard internal economic reconstruction and development. American leaders, therefore, had much reason for believing that Mao was not anxious to engage the United States in Korea. At the very least, had UN forces halted after the initial contacts with Chinese troops, the United States would have been in a far stronger position, both militarily and politically, to counter Peking's moves. Ironically, Washington chose a course that offered minimal prospects for "negotiations from strength."

Whatever the prospects in the first three weeks of November for avoiding a Sino-American collision, there can be little doubt that its occurrence had a momentous impact on American politics and foreign policy in the ensuing years. Shortly after the end of his tenure as secretary of state, Acheson observed that "... this Chinese Communist advance into North Korea . . . was one of the most terrific disasters that has occurred to American foreign policy, and certainly . . . the greatest disaster which occurred to the Truman administration. It did more to destroy and undermine American foreign policy than anything that I know about—the whole communists in Government business, the whole corruption outcry, was really just window-dressing put upon this great disaster."<sup>121</sup>

A generation later, this statement rings truer than ever. The "communists in Government business," of course, had never been far below the surface after the first year of the Truman administration. In early 1950, in fact, the issue had moved into the limelight with senator Joseph R. McCarthy's charges of widespread Communist infiltration into the State Department. Nevertheless, the Sino-American confrontation in Korea made the fall of Chiang K'ai-shek's non-Communist

121. Princeton Seminars, Feb. 13, 1954, Dean Acheson Papers, box 81, Truman Library.



government on the Chinese mainland in 1949 appear more crucial than ever before. Since McCarthy's attacks on the State Department centered on America's China policy, the conflict in Korea could only add weight to the charge that Chiang had been "sold down the river." Even to many Americans not disposed to see treason at home as the source of their problems in Asia, developments in Korea in November 1950 made the Truman administration's failure to prevent a Communist victory in China look all the more ill-advised.<sup>122</sup>

The Sino-American collision prolonged a crisis atmosphere in the United States and led directly to the confrontation over Asian strategy between the president and General MacArthur. This confrontation, in turn, served Republican politicians well in their efforts to undermine public confidence in Democratic leadership. Thus Chinese intervention turned what promised to be a badly needed victory in Asia for the United States into a defeat from which the Truman administration never recovered, even after the Chinese advance was halted and the prewar boundary in Korea largely reestablished.

When increasing evidence of corruption at high levels in the executive branch surfaced during 1951, the administration was already on the defensive. Added to the problems abroad, the corruption issue encouraged Americans to dismiss their national government as the "mess in Washington." By the spring of 1952, despite economic prosperity, the president's popularity rating in a national public opinion poll fell to a low of 26 percent.<sup>123</sup> Thus the Republican party approached the presidential election of 1952 in a most enviable position.

The long-term consequences of the Sino-American engagement in Korea also were substantial. Prior to November 1950, the Truman administration demonstrated some flexibility in its attitude toward Communist China. Although in August 1949 Acheson asserted in the letter of transmittal to the famous White Paper on China that "the Communist leaders have foresworn their Chinese heritage and have publicly announced their subservience to a foreign power, Russia . . . ,"<sup>124</sup> uncertainty remained in Washington as to the nature of the

122. On the Communist issue in American politics, see Alan D. Harper, *The Politics of Loyalty: The White House and the Communist Issue, 1946-1952* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1969) and Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1970).

123. Cabell Phillips, *The Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 402-24; also Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 460-66.

124. U.S. Department of State, *United States Relations with China with*

relationship between Peking and Moscow and the degree to which the United States could influence that relationship. On November 17, 1949, the secretary of state proposed to the president a policy aimed at detaching Peking from Moscow's orbit.<sup>125</sup> Less than two months later, in a major statement on U.S. policy toward Asia, Acheson argued against any American action in defense of Chiang K'ai-shek that might distract the new regime's attention from Soviet domination of "the four northern provinces of China."<sup>126</sup>

Even after the outbreak of war in Korea in June 1950, the administration remained flexible in its attitude toward the government of Mao Tse-tung. To be sure, the United States did intervene in Formosa Strait to prevent a Communist Chinese attack on Chiang's island fortress and did stiffen its policy regarding Peking's admission into the UN. Yet, until the Sino-American confrontation in Korea, these were understood—by Truman and Acheson at least—as temporary positions that would be reevaluated once hostilities on the peninsula ended. After November 1950, however, an American retreat on either issue seemed impossible from a domestic political standpoint and undesirable from a strategic standpoint. The issues, therefore, became major impediments to improved relations between the two countries for over two decades.

Furthermore, events in Korea in late November greatly weakened the view in official Washington circles that, as historian John Lewis Gaddis puts it, "significant differences [existed] between varieties of communism, and that these could be turned to the advantage of the United States."<sup>127</sup> Marshall, testifying at the Senate hearings that followed General MacArthur's dismissal in April 1951, asserted that China was acting "literally under the direction of the Soviet Union."<sup>128</sup> When asked if, in effect, China had been conquered by Russia, Marshall replied, "I think that is generally a fact."<sup>129</sup> International relations were increasingly perceived as a zero sum game with each Communist victory constituting a proportionate setback to "the Free World."<sup>130</sup>

*Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957), pp. 2311-17.

125. Acheson memo of conversation with the president, Nov. 17, 1949, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, box 13, National Archives.

126. U.S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955: Basic Documents* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957), pp. 2311-17.

127. John Lewis Gaddis, "Was the Truman Doctrine a Real Turning Point?" *Foreign Affairs*, January 1974, p. 397.

128. U.S. Congress, *Military Situation in the Far East*.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 703.

130. U.S. Department of Defense, *United States Vietnam Relations 1915-1967* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1971), 8, 188.



The path to American globalism, of course, was to be long and winding. No single event was decisive. Numerous developments between 1947 and 1950 might be regarded as turning points in the direction of American policy.<sup>131</sup> And despite the universalistic rhetoric of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the Eisenhower administration at times exercised restraint on the issue of committing American forces abroad. The decision to accept a partial Communist victory in Indochina in 1954 rather than give the French massive air support at Din Bien Phu reflected a foreign policy that fell short of global containment. Nevertheless, the prolonged engagement in Korea left a legacy of frustration and bitterness toward China in the United States that continued into the 1960s, even after the surfacing of the Sino-Soviet split. The Democratic administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson never forgot the success with which Republicans had used the China issue in the early 1950s.<sup>132</sup> And the memory of Chinese hordes storming UN forces in Korea served to bolster the image of Communist China as an aggressive revolutionary power. As U.S. military involvement in Vietnam increased rapidly after 1964, American leaders constantly warned of the "shadow of Communist China" that threatened Southeast Asia and the entire underdeveloped world.<sup>133</sup> "Moving Peiping to peaceful coexistence," Secretary of State Dean Rusk asserted in January 1966, was "the No. 1 problem in the world today." "If the bellicose doctrines of the Asian communists should reap a substantial reward in Vietnam," Rusk declared, "the outlook for peace in this world would be grim indeed."<sup>134</sup> Thus over a decade after the truce had been reached in Korea, the containment of China remained a central objective of American foreign policy. If the Sino-American collision in Korea did not lead inevitably to the tragic commitment of the United States to South Vietnam in the 1960s, it certainly narrowed the options perceived by American decision makers regarding Asia.

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the road to confrontation with

131. The list includes the British withdrawal from Greece and the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947, the Communist victory in China and the Soviet explosion of an atomic bomb in 1949, and the formulation of NSC 68 and the outbreak of war in Korea in 1950.

132. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972).

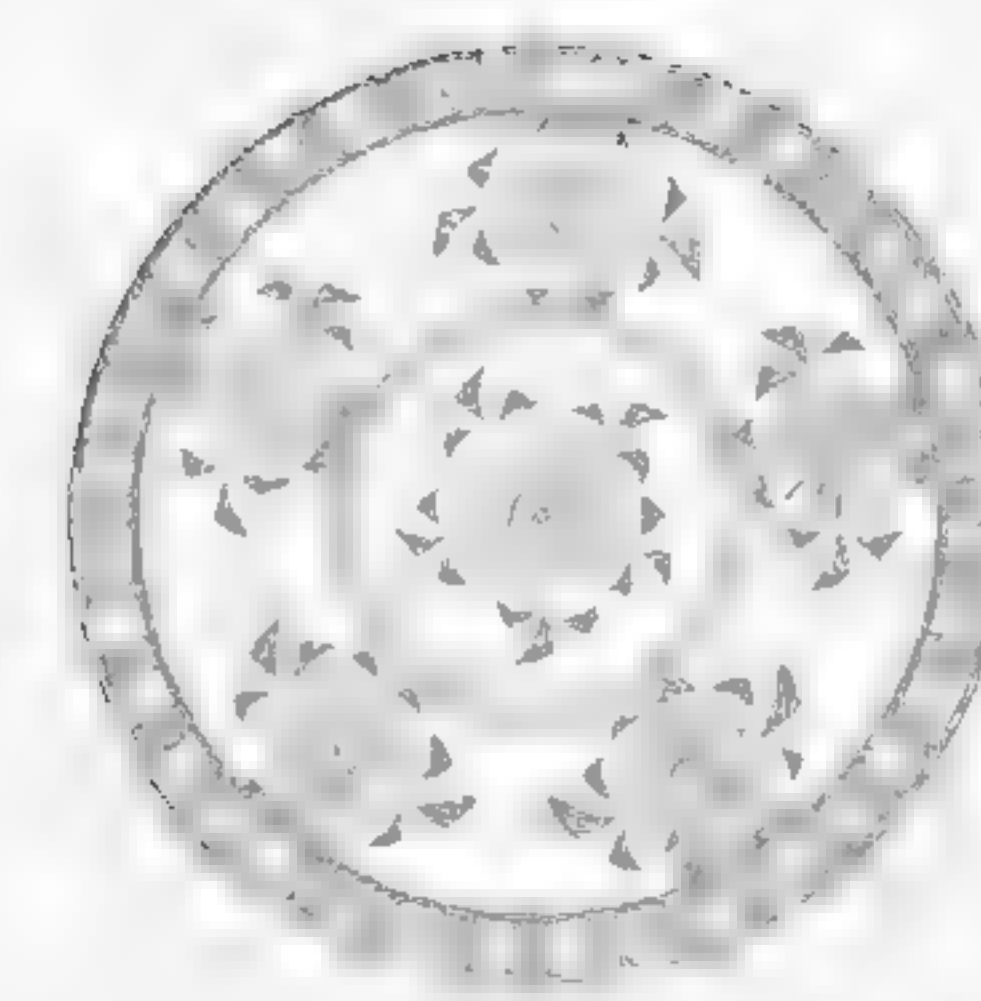
133. See President Johnson's speech at Johns Hopkins University of April 1965 in Department of State, *State Department Bulletin*, Apr. 25, 1965, pp. 606-10.

134. Frank M. Robinson and Earl Kemp, eds., *Report of the U.S. Senate Hearings—The Truth about Vietnam* (San Diego: Greenleaf Classics, 1966), pp. 25, 35.

China in late 1950 is that with the absence of any one of several factors on the American side, it probably would have been averted. Had the commander in the field been less willful and less intimidating, had Truman and his colleagues—especially Acheson—been less beleaguered on the political front at home, had Johnson been at the helm of the Defense Department instead of Marshall, had American intelligence known before November 24 that some 200,000 Chinese troops were in Korea—had any of these pieces of the puzzle been altered, the history of the Korean war might be very different.

Yet the biggest piece of all was the curious mixture of arrogance and insecurity about the world in the minds of American leaders. They were arrogant in overestimating their nation's ability to shape international events and insecure in exaggerating America's need to dominate certain situations. A strong sense of self-righteousness magnified these aspects of their thinking. Thus they lacked sensitivity to the legitimate interests of others and failed to realistically assess America's needs in relation to its capabilities. Rarely does a nation have both the capacity and the will to achieve all that it would like in the world. Powerful as it was, the United States in 1950 was no exception. The essential point missed by American decision makers was that America was not—nor did it need to be—a major military power on the continent of Asia. Regrettably, the Sino-American conflict in Korea was not only rooted in ignorance of this fact, but it taught certain lessons that encouraged Washington to ignore it in the future.





## The Origins of the American Security Commitment to Korea

JOHN KOTCH

THE DECISIONS TO ENGAGE U.S. FORCES IN THE DEFENSE OF THE REPUBLIC OF Korea and to organize a collective security effort under the UN in June 1950 were among the most momentous of the Truman administration in the field of foreign policy. Indeed, Harry Truman considered the Korean decision his most important as president. However, the diverse U.S. role as defender of South Korea in a civil war against the North, organizer of a UN collective security effort and later as container of China created a political climate in which the clashing of policy objectives was almost inevitable. For more than a year and a half, after the beginning of armistice negotiations in Kaesŏng in July 1951, peace—or at least the cessation of active hostilities—remained outside the grasp of the Truman administration. Consequently, it fell to the Eisenhower administration, which took office in January 1953, to end formal hostilities and define and implement the American commitment to Korea in the postarmistice period.

Between April and August 1953, a series of negotiations fundamentally altered the basis of the Korean American security relationship.



In style as well as substance, the negotiations were as protracted, arduous, and bitter as the P'anmunjŏm talks with North Korea and China. They took place simultaneously at two levels: between American and Korean officials in South Korea and the United States, and between Washington (State and Defense departments and the White House) and the field (embassies in Seoul and Tokyo and the UN Command in Tokyo).

For the United States, the principals included Gen. Mark Clark, the UN commander; Ellis Briggs, ambassador to Korea; Robert Murphy, ambassador to Japan; Gen. J. Lawton Collins, army chief of staff; and Walter Robertson, assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs. In addition, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, and President Dwight Eisenhower were directly involved. On the Korean side, President Syngman Rhee and Foreign Minister Y. T. Pyun met on a continuing basis with American political and military officials in Seoul and with emissaries from Washington, including Secretary Dulles and Assistant Secretary Robertson. In addition, the Korean ambassador in Washington kept in close contact with State Department officials.

These negotiations tested the fabric and survivability of the U.S.-Korean security relationship. At bottom lay conflicting national interests, differing assessments of political realities and military capabilities, and disparate conceptions of the U.S. and UN role in Korean security and unification. Such conflicts led to open defiance by Syngman Rhee of American policy, including not just protracted private and public polemics, but the peremptory and defiant release of POWs and continuing threats to march north to unify the Korean peninsula. The American reaction to Rhee's provocations, in turn, went from strong personal representations from the highest U.S. officials to extensive contingency planning for a coup d'état against Rhee.

The final result was a dual ROK-U.S. security relationship with a bilateral mutual defense treaty that reinforced an existing UN structure of collective security that was also dominated by the Americans. The broad terms of this dual security commitment are still in force today, despite the profound changes in Korea and the international sphere in the intervening years.

As the negotiations between the UN Command (UNC) and the Communist forces (Korean People's Army and Chinese People's Volunteers) were drawing to a successful conclusion,<sup>1</sup> U.S. officials began to

1. The obstacles to an early armistice at the beginning of the Eisenhower administration were twofold: Communist intransigence over the principle of "no forced repatriation," which had stalled the talks for most of the previous year and led to an indefinite recess in October 1952; the intransigence of Syngman Rhee who appeared determined to pursue a policy of reunification by force. The

view the preservation of the UNC and the continued participation of South Korean armed forces in it as vital elements of postarmistice security arrangements for Korea. The original U.S. commitment of military force had been hasty and ad hoc, with military assistance provided piecemeal during the first week of hostilities. It was not until the following week (July 7) that the UNC was created to direct and coordinate assistance to South Korea and President Rhee (through an exchange of letters), and at Washington's insistence, placed all ROK forces under General MacArthur's operational control for the duration of hostilities.

The UNC broadened its role and function as the war continued and, with the opening of armistice negotiations, became the formal instrument for the United States and other contributor nations in Korea. After the war, it would be important to political stability on the Korean peninsula. However, once hostilities had stopped, or possibly even before, President Rhee would be free, as leader of a sovereign nation, to withdraw from the UNC. Concerned with this, Clark informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) on April 18 that "Rhee could make independent use of ROK forces after the armistice was signed since no agreement on UN control in the post-truce period existed."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the United States found itself in negotiations in which Korean political behavior was unpredictable. The ROK might not accept armistice under any conditions, or it might agree to the armistice and then withdraw from the UNC. In the most optimistic situation, the ROK would both accept the armistice and remain in the UNC, but there was no way of knowing in advance what path the South Korean government might choose.

Although the terms of the postwar Korean-American security relationship were yet to be worked out, the key issues had already surfaced. They concerned ROK demands for a bilateral security treaty with the United States to supplement or possibly supersede the UNC, and American worries over the future role of the UNC and the ROK's place in it. The idea for a bilateral security pact was first put forward on April 3, 1953, when Korean Foreign Minister Y. T. Pyun implied

former was removed in two stages. First, the Communists agreed to a plan put forward by General Clark to exchange sick and wounded prisoners (dubbed Operation Little Big Switch), followed by a compromise settlement of the repatriation issue, providing for international verification of those desiring nonrepatriation. The latter conflict continued up until the actual signing of the armistice on July 27, 1953.

2. Clark to JCS, Apr. 18, 1953, in Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, U.S. Army Historical Series, Office of the Chief of Military History (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 442.



that "such a pact would be the price of ROK cooperation with armistice efforts."<sup>3</sup> The rationale appeared simple. Although ROK forces had been "voluntarily" placed under an international military command controlled by the United States, the ROK government itself lacked an unambiguous government-to-government security commitment.

Ambassador Briggs told Pyun that he would forward the Korean request to Washington for consideration. In a parallel conversation in Washington on April 8, Dulles informed the Korean ambassador that the United States would prefer to consider a bilateral pact "after the political conference had worked out a peaceful settlement," although he would discuss with the president the possibility of making a statement to the effect that "the U.S. would not desert the ROK."<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Eisenhower on April 14, Rhee again pressed for a security pact, stating that it "was what the Korean people most needed to help them continue fighting."<sup>5</sup> On the same date, General Herren, commander of the Korean Communications Zone (rear support area), suggested to Clark that in view of Rhee's virulent campaign against any armistice agreement, including mass demonstrations denouncing the negotiations in favor of armed unification, the United States should accede to Rhee's request for a security pact. This would prevent a rash act by the Korean president.<sup>6</sup> Clark shared Herren's anxiety about the deteriorating domestic situation in Korea, but felt that the United States should not be pressured into offering a security pact without further study. Primary among Clark's concerns was his reluctance to contravene instructions contained in the emergency war plan (JEWOP) relating to the disposition of U.S. forces in the event of general war. The necessity to rapidly deploy troops from Korea to Japan in such a contingency might be compromised by a security pact.

Other considerations were already at work that presaged a change in Clark's position. In a message to the JCS on April 4, he noted that "at worst the Republic of Korea Government could attempt to withdraw elements of the ROK Army from UN control and remove ROK

3. Mark Clark, Summary of Armistice Negotiations, Feb. 22-July 27, 1953, Clark Papers, Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans., p. 1.

4. Kenneth Young memo, Apr. 18, 1953, U.S. Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, *Relations between the United States and the Republic of Korea: A Chronology of Major Developments April 1-June 22, 1953*, Research Project No. 337, July 1953, p. 1.

5. Ibid.

6. Commander in Chief, Far East (hereafter CINCFE) to Department of the Army, Apr. 16, 1953, in Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 442.

7. Clark to JCS, Apr. 18, 1953, *ibid.*

Government officials from UN influence."<sup>8</sup> Clark believed it essential to resolve the postarmistice status of ROK forces as quickly as possible, whereas the JCS held that it was better to defer the issue until the armistice was "nailed down." Clark regarded the continuance of operational control over ROK forces as a key element of postarmistice security. The problem was that current UN authority over ROK forces had been granted personally by Rhee and existed only "during the period of the continuation of the present state of hostilities"; Clark had a vital stake in clarifying the arrangement before an armistice agreement to avoid a possible unraveling of his authority in the post-armistice period.

On April 24, Ambassador Yang delivered an aide-mémoire to the State Department that tied continued ROK participation in the UNC in the postarmistice period to Chinese withdrawal from Korea.<sup>9</sup> Previously, Rhee had only called for the removal of Chinese forces as part of a five-point proposal for an armistice. On April 30, Rhee proposed additionally that a mutual defense treaty accompany the simultaneous withdrawal of Chinese and American forces from Korea.<sup>10</sup> On May 12, Clark told the Korean president that "the armistice would probably not contain a provision for the simultaneous withdrawal of U.S. and Chinese communist troops," a matter best left to the political conference following the armistice. He also told Rhee that he hoped the ROK would not "confront the U.S. with unilateral decisions such as the removal of ROK troops from the UNC, failing to obey the terms of the armistice, or ordering ROK troops to take provocative action after an armistice."<sup>11</sup> Clark later stated in a message to the JCS that "he saw no reason why a mutual security arrangement could not be worked out as quickly as possible to satisfy the ROK goal." The UN commander felt that Rhee was now resigned to armistice and was simply "bargaining to get a security pact, obtain economic aid, and make his people feel he is to have a voice in the armistice negotia-

The implications of entering into a bilateral security agreement

8. CINCFE (Tokyo) to Department of the Army (Washington) for JCS, Apr. 1, 1953, *ibid.*

9. Yang to Department of State, Apr. 24, 1953, in Department of State, *Chronology*, p. 9.

10. These five points included a united Korea, disarming of North Korean forces, preventing any third party from supplying arms to Communists in Korea, and making clear the sovereignty of the ROK and its right to a voice in international discussions regarding the future of Korea.

11. Telegram from Tokyo, May 1, 1953, no. CX 62220, *ibid.*, p. 13; Clark to Rhee, May 13, 1953, *ibid.*, p. 16.

12. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 445; Clark to JCS, May 13, 1953, *ibid.*



independent of the UNC were also under consideration by policy makers in Washington. They were summarized in a letter from President Eisenhower to Clark, Briggs, and Murphy on May 22. It set forth the rationale for rejecting a security pact with the ROK: (1) the treaty would detract from UN efforts in Korea; (2) it might invite similar action by North Korea's allies; and (3) recent ROK actions in opposing the armistice would make it difficult to explain the treaty to the American people.<sup>13</sup> Eisenhower thus rejected the security treaty option and offered as alternatives the indefinite presence of UN forces in Korea; a UN "greater sanctions statement" (which he viewed as the strongest possible security guarantee for the ROK); a promise to promptly and vigorously attempt to achieve a unified, democratic, and independent Korea and secure the rapid withdrawal of Chinese troops at the political conference following the armistice; and military assistance and support for a twenty-division ROK army. Rhee, predictably, was disappointed by the American rejection and found a greater sanctions statement of little consolation. Clark, however, in contrast to his previous opposition to the security treaty, now concluded that it was a necessary "bargaining chip" in softening the blow of concessions to be made to the Communists at P'anmunjŏm.<sup>14</sup>

At a series of interdepartmental meetings on May 29-30, senior U.S. policy makers considered the following options: (1) the U.S. government would support General Clark's plan (Operation Everready) to establish a military government in Korea by taking President Rhee and his associates into custody in the event of ROK withdrawal from the UNC; (2) the U.S. government would agree to the withdrawal of the UNC from Korea in the event that President Rhee refused to cooperate in reaching or implementing an armistice agreement; (3) the U.S. government would offer the ROK government a mutual defense treaty on the condition that the latter would agree to the provisions of an armistice agreement at P'anmunjŏm.<sup>15</sup>

The participants at these meetings represented a broad cross-section of senior U.S. policy makers, including General Collins; Gen. Clyde

13. Eisenhower to Clark, Briggs, and Murphy, May 29, 1953, Department of State, *Chronology*, p. 21.

14. Eisenhower telegram no. 740, *ibid.*, pp. 18-19; telegram from Tokyo, May 26, 1953, no. 261008z; from Pusan, May 25, 1953, no. 250539z; and from Seoul, May 25, 1953, no. 251230z, *ibid.*, pp. 19-20; Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 446-47.

15. The relevant documents include the Eddleman Memorandum, which sets out the background for the decisions; Operation Everready, which details the plan for implementing a coup against Rhee; the Draft Memorandum for the President, contained in the State-JCS Summary Notes of the May 29 meeting, and several key messages between Washington and Tokyo and Seoul during this period.

Eddleman, assistant chief of staff for plans; Admiral Lalor, secretary of the JCS; H. Freeman Mathews, undersecretary of state; Walter Robertson, Fredrick Nolting, Kenneth Young, and U. Alexis Johnson of the State Department; Frank Nash, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs; and Everett Gleason, deputy secretary of the National Security Council (NSC).<sup>16</sup> At a joint meeting on May 29, the participants discussed the above policy options, which all assumed continued ROK hostility to an armistice agreement. General Collins summed up the alternatives: "One is to give Rhee a security pact; the second is to take Rhee and any other ROK intransigents into custody; and third is to get an agreement from Rhee to cooperate with us until we could get UN forces out of Korea."<sup>17</sup>

Collins favored the second course. "I would take Rhee under protective custody," he said, "rather than submit to his blackmail on the basis of its being necessary for the security of our troops," and pressed his colleagues to give General Clark the necessary authority. A security pact, Collins argued, would "give Rhee the whip hand." This was challenged by Johnson, the State Department representative, who suggested that "we might undertake a commitment to negotiate a pact conditional on Rhee's agreement to an armistice."<sup>18</sup> In planning a coup against Rhee, consideration was given to the role of ROK Chief of Staff General Paek Sŏn-yŏp, then on an official visit to the United States. General Collins noted that Paek "tacitly agreed to back us if Rhee should order his forces to withdraw from the UN Command." Eddleman added that "he would go along with us in the event Rhee jumps over the tracks." Collins also inquired whether the State Department could arrange a meeting between Paek and President Eisenhower, to which Johnson replied: "I doubt whether a *sub rosa* meeting between Paek and President Eisenhower would be advisable. It would be difficult to keep secret and if it leaked, things might be bad." Collins replied that the State Department "ought to think it over."

The conferees drafted a memorandum for the president outlining

16. Clyde Eddleman, "Memorandum for the Record on Current Difficulties with the ROK Government," June 1, 1953; "Notes Recorded by the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, JCS, at the State-JCS Meeting at the Pentagon, May 29, 1953, 11:00 a.m."; "Plan Everready," Eighth Army, Seoul, CS 2056, May 4, 1953; Briggs to Clark, Murphy, and Department of State, May 30, 1953; Collins (chief of staff, U.S. Army, hereafter CSUSA) to Clark (commander in chief, United Nations Command, hereafter CINCUNC), May 30, 1953, no. DA 940238; Collins (CSUSA) to Clark (CINCUNC), May 30, 1953, no. DA 940241.

17. Summary of Notes of JCS State Meeting, May 29, 1953, in Eddleman, "Memorandum for the Record," p. 3.

18. *Ibid.*



the policy options; it took note of Rhee's unresponsiveness to approaches made by Clark and Murphy, personal messages from the president, and Rhee's determination to do "all within his capability to forestall any armistice along present lines." It proposed three alternatives paralleling the Eddleman memorandum:

[1] The UNC would take into custody President Rhee and other intransigent leaders, using ROK forces if possible. This might lead to the establishment of a military government. [2] The UNC would inform Rhee that if he refuses to cooperate in reaching and implementing an armistice or if he takes other action that would endanger the security of UN forces, the UNC would withdraw its units from Korea and cease the logistic support of the ROK armed forces. [3] In lieu of either of the two foregoing alternatives, the United States would agree to enter a bilateral security pact with the ROK providing Rhee gives satisfactory assurances of full cooperation with the UNC, including the acceptance of an armistice.<sup>19</sup>

The memorandum concluded that "action at this time should be limited to the approval of General Clark's plan" and a draft message was prepared giving Clark authority to implement that portion including Operation Everready. The secretaries of state and defense would not concur in the recommendation to implement Everready, however, and the draft message was never sent. Instead, a revised message directed Clark to inform Rhee that the secretary of state would strongly recommend to the president the approval of a bilateral security treaty with the ROK.<sup>20</sup>

On May 30, a second high-level state-defense meeting took place at the State Department. According to the Eddleman memorandum,

General Clark should be notified that the U.S. could not concur in that part of his plan which would establish a United Nations Command military government. It was also agreed to recommend to the President that the U.S. authorize the offering to the ROK Government of a mutual defense treaty, along the lines of our current Philippine and ANZUS treaties, and conditioned upon the ROK Government agreeing to acceptance of an armistice along the lines most recently proposed by the UN Command, to cooperate in the implementation of an armistice agreement, and to leaving its armed forces under operational control of CINUNC until mutually agreed between the U.S. and the ROK that such arrangements were no longer necessary.<sup>21</sup>

The conferees then proceeded to the White House and met with President Eisenhower, who promptly approved the recommendations.

Operation Everready amounted to a U.S.-led coup d'état against

19. Ibid., enclosure A.

20. JCS to Clark, May 30, 1953, JCS file copy, Clark Papers, Eisenhower Library.

21. Eddleman, "Memorandum for the Record."

the legally constituted government of the ROK in the name of the UN. On May 4, 1953, General Clark had prepared it as a contingency plan to be implemented in the event of continued Korean hostility toward the armistice agreement. It was an updated version of an earlier plan (prepared in June 1952) for possible American intervention against the ROK government when Rhee imposed martial law. If Everready had been carried out, the original UN mandate in Korea would have been subverted by the very instrument—the UNC—that had been created to protect it.

The May 29-30 meetings resulted in the elimination of the two extreme options; the unknown factor, however, was whether President Rhee could be persuaded to pay the price for a security treaty—compliance with the armistice agreements and continued UNC operational control over Korean forces in the postarmistice period. Although Clark and Briggs had been authorized on May 30 to discuss the terms of a security pact with the Korean government at their discretion, they waited until the receipt of a letter from Eisenhower on June 6, formally suggesting to the ROK a mutual security pact and a program of economic and military assistance, in exchange for Korean compliance with an armistice accord. The two American emissaries pointed out to Rhee that negotiations toward a treaty could begin as soon as an agreement had been signed. Rhee rejected the Eisenhower proposal, however, and the following day Foreign Minister Pyun stated that the ROK could not accept "any peace or ceasefire that leaves the Chinese communists on the soil of Korea."<sup>22</sup> This position received the unanimous backing of the National Assembly in a resolution two days later. Rhee then advanced a proposal of his own calling for a mutual withdrawal of UN and Chinese forces from Korea. The proposal drew different reactions in Washington and Seoul. On June 2, Clark told Rhee that "the question of withdrawal of all non-Korean forces would have to be taken up at the political conference (following an armistice) unless the Communists would agree to include it in the armistice itself."<sup>23</sup>

The problem with this formulation was that the UNC would also have to withdraw from Korea, rendering moot the basic U.S. policy objective of retaining operational control over Korean armed forces. Secretary Dulles believed that "the simultaneous withdrawal of United Nations and Chinese Communist forces would weaken the UN negotiating position since the UN needed these forces in Korea for all the

22. Department of State, unnumbered telegram, June 7, 1953, Department of State, *Chronology*.

23. Clark to JCS, June 2, 1953, JCS file copy (Hennes, *True Tent*, p. 418).



bargaining power they provided.”<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of a mutual UNC-Chinese withdrawal offered some intriguing possibilities. The United States would have achieved the basic policy objective of NSC 48/5 (May 1951), the withdrawal of its forces from Korea under appropriate armistice arrangements and their redeployment to the more critical area of Western Europe and Japan. While the Chinese would have been compelled to retreat to Manchuria, thus eliminating its military presence (although not its influence) in Korea, a basic Chinese foreign-policy objective and the primary motivation for intervention in Korea—the perceived danger to Chinese security of U.S. troops on the Korean peninsula—would have been achieved. The fundamental disadvantage of the proposal from both the Chinese and American perspectives was that the Koreans would be left to implement and monitor any armistice arrangements, a highly questionable proposition for the two big powers.

On June 22, Clark told Rhee that the issue of simultaneous withdrawal could no longer be allowed to stand in the way of an armistice agreement. The United States simply “was not prepared to eject the Chinese Communist troops from Korea by force or attempt to inject this issue into the terms of the armistice itself.”<sup>25</sup> This ended the possibility of American acceptance of the Rhee proposal, although the Korean president continued to make reference to it in future memoranda.

The lack of success of Clark and Briggs in their earlier overtures to Rhee prompted Dulles to write the Korean president on June 12 as follows:

President Eisenhower and I should like as quickly as possible to establish contact with your Government at a level which would permit of a highly confidential exchange of views between our two governments. The ideal procedure would be for you to come to Washington where you could talk on a confidential basis with President Eisenhower and myself. If, however, your responsibilities in Korea make this seem impracticable, let us think up some alternatives. Let me emphasize that these talks must be at a high level and strictly confidential.<sup>26</sup>

Although Rhee quickly declined the invitation, citing the press of business in Korea, he readily agreed to Dulles’s suggestion to receive Assistant Secretary for the Far East Walter Robertson in his stead. Dulles stressed to Rhee that “Robertson could be helpful in clearing up any misunderstandings regarding U.S. postarmistice policies and

24. Young memo of conversation of Dulles, Robertson, Paek, and Yang, June 17, 1953, Department of State, *Chronology*.

25. Clark to Department of the Army, June 22, 1953, JCS file copy (Hermes, *Truce Tent*).

26. Dulles to Rhee, June 17, 1953, Department of State, *Chronology*, p. 33.

that his journey would emphasize joint U.S.-ROK efforts.”<sup>27</sup> On June 18, Rhee suddenly released 25,000 militantly anti-Communist POWs, thus raising the basic issue of whether the UNC still exercised operational control over Korean military forces. A UN press statement charged that this action “had been secretly planned and carefully coordinated at top levels of the Korean Government with outside assistance furnished the prisoners in their mass escape.”<sup>28</sup> This was followed by a swift spate of denunciations by U.S. officials. The president wrote Rhee on June 18 that his action was “in clear violation of previous assurances to General Clark to respect the authority of the UN Command” and that “unless you are prepared immediately and unequivocally to accept the authority of the UN Command to conduct the present hostilities and to bring them to a close, it will be necessary to effect another arrangement [for which] the UN Command has now been authorized to take such steps as may be necessary.” In a meeting with ROK Prime Minister Paek, then in Washington, Secretary Dulles similarly stressed “the impossible situation created by the ROK challenge to the authority of the UN Command” and emphasized that without unity and cooperation, some new arrangement would have to be put into effect.”<sup>29</sup>

The threat to “take such steps as may be necessary” suggested direct action against President Rhee, along the lines of Operation Everready. Clark expressed “profound shock at this unilateral abrogation of your personal commitment,” and noted the UNC’s control over ROK forces. In a letter of June 20, Rhee again told Clark that “signing the present armistice would be considered a drastic change in the US-ROK relationship,” and that he did not see “how the ROK forces could remain under your command.” On the following day he qualified this, telling Gen. Maxwell Taylor, the Eighth Army commander, that “he hoped it would not be necessary to withdraw ROK forces from the UNC.”<sup>30</sup>

A Rhee aide-mémoire given to Clark on June 22 suggested the following conditions for ROK adherence to American plans:

(1) If, after ninety days the political conference fails to obtain an agreement on Chinese withdrawal, within the following sixty days, the armistice shall be declared

27. Ibid.

28. CINCFE to Department of the Army, June 18, 1954, in UNC/FEC Report, June 1953, Source Papers, no. 217, pp. 151-297.

29. Eisenhower to Rhee; Dulles to Rhee; June 18, 1953, in Department of State, *Chronology*, pp. 38-39.

30. Clark to Rhee, June 18, 1953; telegram from Tokyo, June 21, 1953, no. CX 63521; Department of the Army telegram, June 21, 1953, no. C 63236, in Department of State, *Chronology*, addendum, pp. 9, 40-41.



null and void, and ROK troops will advance north with air and naval support by the United States. (2) The United States will enter into a mutual defense pact with the ROK before signing the armistice. (3) The United States will give this Government adequate military aid to build up ROK land, sea and air strength and economic aid to rehabilitate the economy with a view toward eventual self-sufficiency.<sup>31</sup>

The second condition presented obvious difficulties for the United States. Rhee's determination to pursue a military solution even after an armistice sharply conflicted with Washington's desire to work "peacefully" for reunification.

Was Washington's expressed desire for peaceful reunification realistic? In a letter to Rhee on June 12, Dulles pointed out that by using the term "peaceful unification," the United States was not indulging in "empty phrases": "I want to personally say to you that when we talk about unification of Korea by methods other than war, we are not using empty phrases. We have a real determination to achieve this objective and we have hopes that it can be achieved, hopes which are based upon ideas which we are in the process of developing."<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the best indication that Dulles had something concrete in mind was a statement by Senate Republican Leader William Knowland on July 1, 1953, that had all the earmarks of a trial balloon: "You could get a united Korea whose neutrality is guaranteed by all the great powers, not as a UN trusteeship but as a free nation. Russia and China would be reasonably assured that Korea would not be used as a jumping off place for war against them. At the same time, we and Japan would have assurance that Korea would not be used as a jumping off place for aggression against us."<sup>33</sup> Dulles himself unveiled a proposal in September 1953 for American withdrawal, conditional on elections supervised by the UN for an independent but neutral Korea.<sup>34</sup> Yet not much was done to pursue this interesting option.

The immediate issues of continued ROK participation in the UNC, a mutual security treaty, and future reunification plans all turned on whether the ROK action in freeing the POWs imperiled the armistice agreement, which was awaiting final approval. Whether

31. Rhee aide-mémoire, Kyung Mu Dai, June 22, 1953, Clark Papers, Eisenhower Library.

32. U.S. Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, *The Robertson-Rhee Talks and Their Aftermath: A Chronology of the Principal Developments in US-ROK Relations, June 22-July 26, 1953*, Research Project No. 339, July 1953, p. 31.

33. Telegram no. 8, July 2, 1953, Department of State, *Chronology*.

34. *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1953.

the ROK would be a party to such an armistice or allow for its implementation were legitimate concerns of Communist negotiators as well as American officials. Despite UN assurances, the Communists charged that "the UN Command had known about the plan [to release the POWs in advance] and had 'deliberately connived' with Rhee to carry it out."<sup>35</sup>

On June 24, 1953, a major conference of U.S. military and civilian officials took place in Tokyo preparatory to the arrival in Seoul of the Robertson mission, which had been delayed by Rhee's release of the POWs. In addition to Robertson, General Collins (who had accompanied him from Washington), General Clark, and Ambassadors Murphy and Briggs were in attendance. The principal recommendations of the group were:

(1) An armistice should be signed as soon as possible. (2) If Rhee remains intransigent, Robertson should be authorized to inform Rhee that the UN will get out of Korea. In this event, we should be prepared to make an agreement with the Communists, independent of the ROK, for withdrawal of UN forces; also provision for release of our POWs held by the Communists. (3) General Clark feels that the only conditions under which there might be a possibility that the ROK Army would take action to replace the present ROK government would be after Rhee had been informed categorically that we intend to withdraw from Korea unless he agrees to an armistice and the ROK Army is convinced we mean business.<sup>36</sup>

The first recommendation reaffirmed the overriding U.S. policy objective in Korea: an early armistice. The second favored disengagement and recalled Robertson's earlier admonition to the State-JCS meeting on May 30 that "if Rhee were taken into custody, it should be for the purpose of getting out of Korea."<sup>37</sup> The third recommendation clearly implied that the threat of withdrawal was to serve as a catalyst for a coup against Rhee.

These recommendations evoked mixed reaction in Washington. Clark was authorized "the widest latitude in the specific terms of the armistice and handling the problem of the ROK attitude toward the armistice provided he adhered to the principle of no-force repatriation and undertook no obligation to the Communists to use force against the ROK to insure its compliance with the armistice." However, Clark was authorized to take action that might "lead ROK political and military leaders to believe that if ROK compliance with the armistice was not forthcoming, the UN Command would be prepared to with-

35. Msg CX 36907, CINCFE to DA, June 18, 1953, in UNC/FEC Command Report, June 1953, Source Papers No. 21.

36. Robertson and Collins (CINCUNC, Tokyo) to Departments of State, Defense, JCS, June 25, 1953, Robertson-Clark-Rhee Summary, Clark Papers, Eisenhower Library.

37. Liddleman, "Memorandum for the Record," May 29, 1953.



draw from Korea."<sup>38</sup> A few days later, an ROK Army (ROKA) coup against Rhee was endorsed with the proviso that it be discreetly arranged. The JCS advised Clark that "the most promising line of action now open seems to be to cause Rhee and his advisers to believe that we will withdraw from Korea in the event he sabotages the armistice. If no change occurs in Rhee's attitude, it would be our hope that influential ROK political and military elements would themselves take steps to bring about a situation in the ROK Government which will assure ROK cooperation with an armistice." Clark was specifically directed to exploit the possibility by "quietly and adroitly creating the impression among Rhee and ROK leaders that the UN Command was preparing to withdraw."<sup>39</sup>

The internal situation in Korea, however, was far different from that which prevailed earlier, with Rhee now enjoying the full support of both the National Assembly and the members of his own government. On June 24, he formed what amounted to a war cabinet: an ROK National Defense Committee with himself as chairman, and also included the prime minister and the ministers of foreign affairs, defense, finance, and home affairs as well as the three service chiefs of staff.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Rhee also enjoyed the support of senior military officials, including Gen. Paek Sŏn-yŏp, the very people that American officials were looking to as potential coup initiators. If U.S. policy makers believed that Rhee was vulnerable to a coup from within, they appeared to be wrong.

The Robertson talks with Rhee began on June 25. Rhee expressed his dissatisfaction that the armistice would not require the withdrawal of Chinese Communist forces from North Korea and argued that the political conference would involve endless discussions and provide the Communists with unlimited opportunities for subversion and infiltration. Robertson emphasized the advantages accruing to the ROK from existing American assurances of support and its intention to collaborate closely with the ROK in the political conference toward the attainment of a free, unified, and independent Korea. He expressed the view that the two sides were in basic agreement on an armistice, although certain items remained to be resolved: the ROK demand for a ninety-day limit on the political conference, economic aid, the buildup of the

38. JCS to CINCFE (Tokyo), June 25, 1953, JCS file copy, Clark Papers, Eisenhower Library.

39. JCS to CINUNC (Tokyo), June 25, 1953, Clark Papers, Eisenhower Library.

40. Telegram from Pusan, June 25, 1953, no. 1465, Department of State, *Robertson Rhee Talks*, p. 9.

ROKA to twenty divisions, and an immediate guarantee of a mutual defense pact.<sup>41</sup>

Robertson called any time limit on a political conference "an impossible condition," although he agreed to present Rhee's proposal to Dulles. He also agreed at Rhee's request to interpret the word "guarantee" to mean that negotiations for a defense pact could begin at once rather than await the actual signing of an armistice, although final approval would be contingent on Senate action, which in all probability could not take place until after an armistice had been concluded. Finally, Robertson accepted condition three of Rhee's aide-mémoire of June 23, relating to military and economic assistance.<sup>42</sup> However, the crucial question of an American commitment to renew hostilities in the likely event that the projected postarmistice political conference failed to resolve the political future of Korea remained in dispute.

On June 27, Robertson and Clark told Rhee that the United States could not impose a time limit on other countries participating in the postarmistice conference, but if at the end of ninety days it was clear that the conference was not making progress and was instead providing the Communists an opportunity to infiltrate and propagandize against the ROK, the United States would be prepared to act in concert with the ROK and withdraw from the conference. An addendum was included that stipulated:

The above assurances from the Government of the U.S. are dependent upon agreement of the Government of the ROK (a) to accept the authority of the UN to conduct and conclude the hostilities (b) to support the armistice entered into between CINUNC and the commanders of the Communist forces, and to pledge its full support and collaboration in carrying out the terms thereof, and (c) that the armed forces of the ROK will remain under the operational control of CINUNC until Governments of the U.S. and ROK mutually agree that such arrangements are no longer necessary.

Rhee rejected the U.S. position and substituted a revised text providing for the conclusion of a mutual security pact before the signing of an armistice agreement, and insisting on the resumption of combat operations if the planned political conference did not eliminate the Chinese presence in North Korea. Continued ROK participation in the UNC was tied to a U.S. commitment to military victory.<sup>44</sup> Robertson returned Rhee's draft with the admonition

41. Telegram no. 28, June 25, 1953; no. 29, June 27, 1953, Department of State, *Chronology*, pp. 13-14.

42. Ibid.

43. CINUNC (at 8th Army 8) telegram, June 28, 1953, no. 281528z, Department of State, *Robertson Rhee Talks*, pp. 16-18.

44. Ibid., p. 19.



that "it contained so many inaccuracies and so much of it was irrelevant that it could not provide a basis for further discussion." A second American aide-mémoire then stated that the United States "would be prepared to withdraw from a political conference" and consult immediately with the ROK on what steps might properly and reasonably be taken if no agreement on Chinese withdrawal or a unified Korea was achieved after ninety days. In addition, it agreed to begin immediately to draft a mutual defense treaty, although the ratification of such a treaty "would be subject to the advice and consent of the Senate." The ROK, for its part, would agree to support the armistice and, "in the interests of the continued security of the ROK," to keep its armed forces under the operational control of the UNC until the two governments agreed that this was no longer necessary.<sup>45</sup> This latest American proposal met previous ROK objections in that negotiations toward a mutual defense treaty could begin at once; it ruled out the use of military force if the conference failed. The administration skillfully utilized the need for congressional approval of any security treaty or military assistance program as a political lever in restraining Rhee. Robertson explained that "whereas the current Korean hostilities were based on a UN resolution and constituted action which the U.S. had been in a position to take because of membership in the UN, what Rhee proposed was not a UN action but action specifically outside the UN to be taken jointly by the ROK and the U.S." In a top secret cable to Robertson on July 1, 1953, Dulles told him to "explain to Rhee that not only is his proposal [for unilateral action] beyond the scope of authority you have from the President but that the President, even if he wanted could not constitutionally give the pledge which Rhee seeks. This would, in effect, be war which the President could not conduct without authorization from Congress."<sup>46</sup>

Congress was behind the administration on this. Senior Republican and Democratic senators favored "a last appeal to Rhee to join in the truce and that if this failed, General Clark would be instructed simply to sign anyhow for the U.S. and the UN."<sup>47</sup> In a cable to Rhee on July 1, Senators Knowland and Smith and Congressman Walter Judd (all bitterly anti-Communist) expressed the hope that Rhee would sign the armistice and thus continue the "close cooperation and friendship which our two nations have had in mutual defense of Korea against Communist aggression." Acting Secretary of State Bedell Smith,

45. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

46. Telegram from Seoul, July 3, 1953, no. 8, and telegram to Seoul, July 1, 1953, no. 4, *ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

47. *New York Times*, June 26, 1953.

citing a growing lack of confidence in Rhee, told the Korean ambassador in Washington that the "ratification of the mutual defense pact would be dependent on what Rhee and the ROK did between then and the time of the Senate consideration of that treaty."<sup>48</sup>

Undeterred, Rhee turned the Congressional argument around, noting that: "The same constitutional limitations which prevented Eisenhower from making pledges regarding future action involving war also made it impossible for Korea to be sure of obtaining a mutual defense pact which would have to be approved by the United States Senate, and unless he could be sure of this pact he would have nothing with which to secure the support of the Korean people for an armistice."<sup>49</sup> When Rhee asked Robertson on July 6 for some concrete evidence of congressional support for the defense pact, he was bluntly told that "the President would not have offered the pact if he had not believed the Senate would support him." Yet on July 7, Rhee reiterated his contention that the promise of a mutual defense treaty was not "an assurance of complete and effective nature for the simple reason that it is so dependent upon ratification of the Senate to be effective at all."<sup>50</sup> Administration warnings were supported in a blast from Republican Senator Alexander Wiley, a key member of the Foreign Relations Committee, expressing the view that Rhee was doing "his nation, his Allies, the United Nations as a whole and the cause of world peace infinite damage by his continued reckless attitude and by displaying in his patriotic zeal an unfortunate extremism, obstinacy and arbitrariness."<sup>51</sup>

There is little question that the administration was doing about all it could to help prepare for Senate approval of a mutual security treaty. If, however, Rhee agreed to an armistice without actually having a treaty in hand, where would his protection against renewed aggression lie? Kenneth Young, a member of Robertson's party, pointed out that the greater sanctions statement then being drawn up provided the ROK with the necessary assurances against a future Communist attack and that the ROK could safely leave to the postarmistice period the negotiation and ratification of a mutual defense treaty.<sup>52</sup> At the

48. Telegrams to Seoul, July 1, 1953, no. 5, July 5, 1953, no. 16, Department of State, *Robertson-Rhee Talks*, p. 40.

49. Young memo of conversation of Robertson, Rhee, Paek, and Pyun, July 4, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

50. Department of the Army telegram, July 6, 1953, no. DTG060600z; telegram from Seoul, July 18, 1953, no. 29, *ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

51. *New York Times*, July 8, 1953.

52. Young memo, July 4, 1953, Department of State, *Robertson-Rhee Talks*, pp. 38-39.



same time, however, General Taylor, Eighth Army commander, was implementing a plan developed by Clark "to induce, through covert means, speculation as to UN Command intent at high ROK government levels." Taylor broadcast a statement that UN troops would be moved out of the line of battle in the event of an armistice, with or without ROK cooperation. Clark's plan included conferences among high-level U.S. commanders, a slowdown of supplies and equipment deliveries to the ROK, contingency plans for withdrawal, and a slowdown of the projected build-up of the ROKA—all designed "to have a definite impact on Rhee and influential ROK military and political elements."<sup>53</sup>

Rhee spelled out his final position in a letter to Robertson on July 9, in which he agreed "to leave his troops under the UN Command so long as the UNC did not engage in activities which he considered to be against the interests of Korea." He also stated that "although we cannot sign the truce, we shall not obstruct it, so long as no measures or actions taken under the armistice are detrimental to our national survival."<sup>54</sup> Here, at last, was an acceptable formula that Robertson could take back to Washington.

At the armistice negotiations on July 12, the Communists demanded to know whether the UNC could: (1) insure that the ROKA would in fact cease fire and withdraw upon the signing of an armistice; (2) insure the safety of the neutral nations' personnel; and (3) insure that the UNC would give no support to the ROK, including equipment or supplies, if the ROKA took aggressive action after an armistice. Further, they refused to accept a prior UNC explanation that the ROK was "prepared to carry out the terms of the armistice." Without specifying what assurances had been provided, the UNC representative expressed the conviction that the ROKA would remain under its operational control after an armistice and that the UNC would not have entered into an armistice unless it was prepared to carry it out.<sup>55</sup> Although not fully satisfied, the Communist negotiators did not press the issue further.

While ultimately successful in securing a pledge from Rhee not to obstruct the armistice agreement, the Robertson-Rhee talks had to be backed with threats at several points. Thus, Robertson was in-

53. CINCUNC to secretary of defense, July 5, 1953, JCS file copy, Clark Papers, Eisenhower Library; telegram from Seoul, July 8, 1953, no. 29, Department of State, *Robertson-Rhee Talks*, pp. 42-43.

54. Telegram no. DTG 091125z, July 9, 1953 and no. DTG 091315z, July 9, 1953, Department of State, *Robertson-Rhee Talks*, pp. 49-51.

55. Armistice Meetings, July 16, 1953, *ibid.*, p. 72.

structed on July 5 that "if Rhee's reply to your *aide-mémoire* of July 3 and letter is still unsatisfactory, the time has probably come for you to leave if you feel that your continued presence will serve no useful purpose."<sup>56</sup> Also, had Rhee not agreed to drop his demand for military action following a political conference, U.S. policy makers could well have urged intervention and the implementation of Operation Ever-ready. A State Department query to Robertson on July 3 spoke of planning by the UNC for "other arrangements referenced in Eisenhower's letter of June 18 and for which CINCUNC had already been authorized to take the necessary steps."<sup>57</sup>

During their conversations, Robertson and Rhee had exchanged drafts of a mutual defense treaty. These drafts both affirmed the existence of a direct security linkage between the United States and the ROK and provided explicit measures for strengthening this bond. The two versions closely paralleled each other, and the preliminary draft was finally initialed by Dulles during his visit to Korea in August 1953. The operative provisions were as follows:

Article II. In order more effectively to achieve the objective of this Treaty, the Parties separately and jointly by self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

Article IV. Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific region on either of the Parties in areas, under their respective administrative control, as such areas are now or may hereafter be mutually defined in administrative agreements of the type referred to in Article V of the present Treaty, would be dangerous to its own peace and safety, and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes.

Any armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore international peace and security.<sup>58</sup>

In the final version, Korea also granted the United States the right to dispose "by mutual agreement land, sea and air forces in and about the ROK." This furnished the United States with a legal basis to maintain troops in Korea independent of the UNC.

Article IV formed the heart of the treaty, but it stopped short of an automatic commitment to defend Korea against external aggression. First, it specified that such an obligation would come into force only in the event of external aggression against the ROK. Aggression initi-

56. Acting Secretary of State Smith to Robertson (drafted by U. Alexis Johnson), July 5, 1953, *ibid.*, p. 44.

57. Telegram from Seoul to secretary of state, July 5, 1953, no. 15, *ibid.*, p. 40.

58. Telegram from Tokyo, July 5, 1953, no. 063497, *ibid.*, pp. 37-38.



ated by the ROK with the goal of reunification by force was excluded. Second, as in the NATO treaty, the form of assistance to be rendered was left open to determination by constitutional processes.

While Rhee attached great importance to a mutual defense treaty as an expression of an unambiguous security commitment from the United States, how much additional clout the treaty actually offered South Korea remained unclear. The continued presence of the UNC and a greater sanctions statement issued on the eve of the armistice gave the ROK more than what it got in the security treaty—an automatic external military commitment backed by the United States and other countries engaged in the settlement: “If in violation of the armistice the Republic of Korea is subjected to unprovoked attack you may of course count upon our immediate and automatic military reaction. Such an attack would not only be an attack upon the Republic of Korea but an attack upon the United Nations Command and U.S. forces within that Command.”<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the United States agreed to a quasi-permanent security role in Korea. This was expressed in a protocol between the United States and the ROK that placed South Korean forces under the operational control of the UNC as long as it was responsible for the defense of the ROK.<sup>60</sup> The treaty gave the United States a legal basis to formulate policy with respect to Korea independent of the UN, thus providing insurance against any possibility that the UN mandate might be revoked as a consequence of shifting UN majorities. Although this was not likely to occur in the 1950s, it nearly occurred in the 1970s. Moreover, the United States could point to UN goals in Korea as legitimizing a continued U.S. military presence, in essence invoking a UN mandate to pursue unilateral policies. Finally, the compelling rationale of maintaining the authority of the UN to resolve the issue of Korean unification, a cornerstone of U.S. policy since 1947, was not compromised.

The ROK could continue to use the UN banner to justify its cause, while benefiting from a direct U.S. security relationship. And as long as the UN mandate for Korea remained in force, the participation of Korean military forces in the UNC gave the South a powerful international political advantage over the North. The principal negative aspect of the dual security commitment was that it ran the risk of undercutting the concept of collective security, which was the primary justification for U.S. intervention in Korea in the first place. While the UN Charter (Article 51) did allow for defensive arrangements

59. Dulles to Rhee, July 24, 1953, *ibid.*, p. 95.

60. See U.S. Department of State, *State Department Bulletin*, November 1954, p. 352.

designed to enhance the prospects of international peace and security such as NATO, a collective security vehicle had already been created. Where, then, was the justification for a parallel bilateral security treaty?

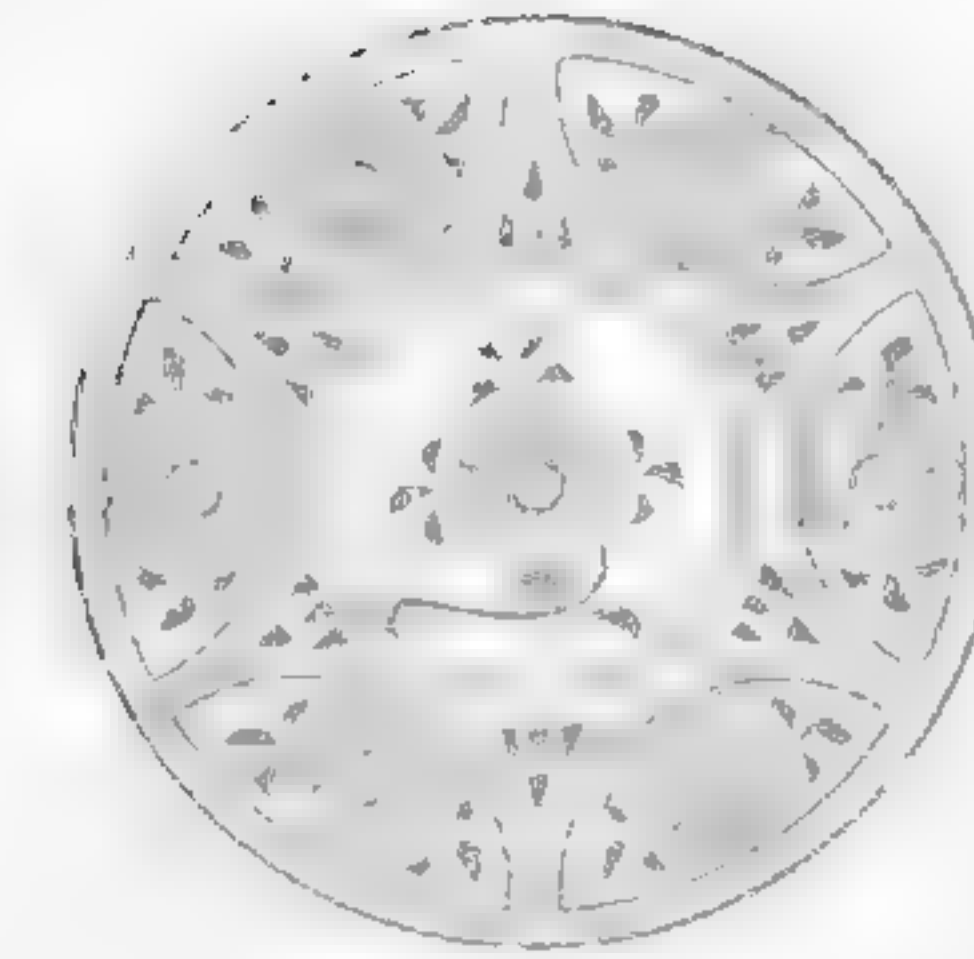
The American desire for dual security was reflected in the original U.S. draft of the Mutual Security Treaty (not part of the final version), which stated that “this treaty does not affect and shall not be interpreted as affecting in any way the rights and obligations of the Parties under the Charter of the United Nations or the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security.”<sup>61</sup> Also, in an exchange during congressional hearings on the practical effect of the dual commitment between Senator Smith of New Jersey and Secretary Dulles, Dulles pointed out that they were both applicable in different ways: “This particular treaty” said Smith, “does not contemplate apparently any participation by the United Nations, so we are assuming now special responsibilities in Korea by the United States alone. Is that a correct statement?” “It is correct,” Dulles replied, “as far as this treaty goes; but of course as the United Nations Charter is also a treaty and its general terms are applicable to Korea, as to other parts of the world.”<sup>62</sup>

The Mutual Defense Treaty furnished an additional legal basis for the U.S. military presence in Korea and formalized the bilateral nature of the U.S. security commitment to the ROK, but it also had the twin virtues of providing for the security of the ROK against external aggression in the absence of indigenous military self-sufficiency, and, in effect, deterring the ROK from attempting to bring about unification militarily. For the Americans, if not for Syngman Rhee, the protective and preventive functions were complementary and necessary.

61. Telegram from Tokyo, July 5, 1953, no. C 63497, Department of State, *Robertson-Rhee Talks*.

62. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., Jan. 13, 1954 (Washington, D. C.: GPO), pp. 10-11.





## The Struggle over the Korean Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?

BARTON J. BERNSTEIN

EVEN WITH THE REVIVED INTEREST IN THE KOREAN WAR, MOST OF THE SCHOLARLY literature continues to focus on its origins, Chinese entry into the conflict, and the Truman-MacArthur controversy. Few have examined the troubling problems of the lengthy negotiations to end the war.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Institute for Humane Studies in July 1978, the East Asian seminar at Stanford University in October 1979, the Columbia University Korea seminar in November 1979, the International Studies Association convention in March 1980, the Conference for Peace Research in History in April 1980, and the Korean War conference at the University of Washington in June 1980. The author is especially indebted to Alexander George and John Lewis of Stanford University, and Bruce Cumings of the University of Washington for their counsel, and to the Ford Foundation International Studies Program and the Stanford Arms Control and Disarmament Program and the East Asian Program for support.

1. Among those are: Walter Hermes, *From Truce Tent to Fighting Front* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966); "The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy," mimeographed, Modern Military Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C., vol. 3, James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, "The Korean War," pt. 2 (1978); Gabriel and Joyce Kolko, *The Limits of Power* (New York: Harper, 1972), pp. 610-17; Wilfred Bacchus,



Did the United States, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) want to end the conflict?<sup>2</sup> Why did these nations take more than two years, from July 10, 1951, to July 27, 1953, to achieve an armistice? They consumed nearly five months quarreling over, first, the agenda, and then, violations of neutrality and the location of the armistice line. Between November 1951 and May 1952, they slowly agreed on inspections and troop replacements, and conditionally on reconstruction of airfields and membership on an international supervisory commission. By May, there was only one unresolved issue—voluntary versus automatic repatriation of prisoners of war.

Even after a quarter century, the troubling question remains: was this dispute over POWs actually the issue that blocked an agreement for fifteen months? Or did one or more of the powers seize on this issue to conceal other goals and to prevent an armistice? Such questions raise related problems. Why did the Truman administration insist on voluntary repatriation? Did the president and his advisers foresee the lengthy stalemate? Did the Truman administration ever consider compromising on the issue? Was it actually important to the PRC and the DPRK? If so, why?

Unfortunately, the sources from the Communist side are still skimpy, so often it is only possible to suggest interpretations of their policy. But the recent declassification of many American documents<sup>3</sup> makes it possible to analyze, in depth, the tactics and goals of the Truman administration in pursuing armistice negotiations.

#### OPENING NEGOTIATIONS

By the late spring of 1951, after the United States had halted two large Communist attacks, the war was moving toward a bloody stale-

<sup>2</sup> "The Relationship between Combat and Peace Negotiations: Fighting While Talking in Korea, 1951-1953," *Orbis* 17 (Summer 1973): 547-74; Robert Simmons, *The Strained Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1975), pp. 198-240; Edward Friedman, "Nuclear Blackmail and the End of the Korean War," *Modern China* 1 (January 1975): 75-91; Barton J. Bernstein, "Truman's Secret Thoughts on Ending the Korean War," *Foreign Service Journal* 57 (November 1980): 31-33, 44; and John Gittings, "Talks, Bombs, and Germs: Another Look at the Korean War," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 5, no. 2 (1975): 205-17.

<sup>3</sup> 2. Syngman Rhee and his ROK government opposed the armistice because it would mean a divided Korea. See Barton J. Bernstein, "The Pawn As Rook: The Struggle to End the Korean War," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 10 (January-February, 1978): 38-47.

<sup>3</sup> 3. Much of this material has been requested since 1975, under mandatory review and the Freedom of Information Act. It includes National Security Council (NSC) papers; the files of the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), H. Freeman Matthews, Korea Lot, and 795 at the Department of State; the Dean Acheson Papers, George

mate on the ground. On May 30, Gen. Matthew Ridgway, UN and American commander in the Pacific, reported to Washington that the enemy had suffered a massive defeat—thousands of deaths, about ten thousand prisoners, destruction of equipment, and loss of food. "For the next thirty days," he counseled, "the . . . Government should be able to count . . . upon a military situation in Korea offering optimum advantages in support of diplomatic negotiations [for an armistice]."<sup>4</sup>

The Truman administration was eager to end the war on what it considered decent terms—a divided Korea near the thirty-eighth parallel, inspections to bar the introduction of more foreign troops, exchange of all prisoners of war, and an ultimate withdrawal of foreign forces.<sup>5</sup> In America, the war was bitterly unpopular. The beleaguered administration confronted strong pressures from Congress and the electorate to pull out or to bomb Manchuria and even China. Alarmed by such demands, America's allies, especially Britain, major Commonwealth nations, and some NATO members, were pushing for an armistice. The West's intervention in the war in 1950 had established the commitment to stop Communist aggression, America's allies stated. By 1951, they wanted an end to the war. Why continue to fight an enervating war, they asked, which drained American and allied resources, provoked demands for reckless escalation, and actually weakened the western alliance? Many asked if the Soviet Union were not the chief beneficiary. Some even contended that termination of the war would free China from its dependence on the Soviet Union and allow their enmity to grow. America's allies did not want victory, only a respectable settlement. A divided Korea, a return to the status quo ante (at the thirty-eighth parallel), would meet their needs admirably.<sup>6</sup>

Korean War (hereafter Materials), copies of Korean War documents (hereafter Documents), the President's Secretary's Files (PSF) at the Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo.; "Pertinent Papers on the Korean War," (hereafter "Pertinent Papers") at the Truman Library and at the Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington, D.C.; Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army, and Defense records at the National Archives, Washington, D.C., and the Pentagon; and Army records at the Military History Collection, Carlisle, Pa.

<sup>4</sup> 4. Commander in Chief, the Far East (CINCFE) (Ridgway) to Department of the Army for JCS, May 30, 1951, C 63744, Record Group (hereafter RG), 218, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45), National Archives (hereafter JCS Records).

<sup>5</sup> 5. NSC 48/5, May 17, 1950, NSC box, Modern Military Records, National Archives; William J. Hopkins to president, May 8, 1951, PSF, box 129, Truman Library; George Elsey to David Lloyd, May 3, 1951, "New Peace Proposals," Lloyd Files, Truman Library; Matthew Connelly, "Cabinet Meeting," June 11, 1951, Connelly Papers, Truman Library; "Briefing of Ambassadors," June 5 and 29, 1951, Materials; and Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 531.

<sup>6</sup> 6. Denis Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint: Canada, the Korean War, and*



Given the aims of the administration and the anxieties of allies, General Ridgway thought that there was little point in pushing the Communists north some forty or fifty miles; small pieces of real estate had little value and were not worth the cost in American lives. A major American offensive could be even more expensive. Even if initially successful, such an offensive would increase American casualties, provoke China to commit more troops, expand the savagery of the war, frighten America's allies, and increase domestic pressures on the administration for further escalation or withdrawal. Ridgway understood that the politics of limited war required military caution and a willingness to accept stalemate.<sup>7</sup>

The Truman administration was looking for ways to start negotiations. Fearful of holding them at the UN, where neutrals might propose terms injurious to the United States, the administration moved to informal channels. The Department of State authorized George Kennan, former head of the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), to approach Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Jacob Malik. Secretary of State Dean Acheson and others believed that Russia controlled the PRC and DPRK. On June 5, in response to Kennan's approach, Malik privately said that the Soviets wanted peace in Korea and recommended that the United States talk to North Korea and China. "No doubt existed," Acheson later recalled, "that the message was authentic . . . [but it] left us wondering what portended and what we should do next." In the next few weeks, the United States apparently did nothing.<sup>8</sup>

*the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 171-82; Brian Porter, *Britain and the Rise of Communist China* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 116-20; Acheson to General Bradley, May 12, 1951, with "Text of a Message from Mr. Morrison to Mr. Acheson, Dated May 10, 1951," Acheson Papers.

7. CINCFE (Ridgway) to Department of the Army (DEPTAR) for JCS, June 14, 1951, CX 64976, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); JCS to CINCFE (Ridgway), June 20, 1951, JCS 94501, "Pertinent Papers," Office of the Chief of Military History; CINCFE (Ridgway) to JCS, June 26, 1951, C 65800, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45), Pentagon; J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), pp. 306-7; Matthew Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Popular Books, 1967), pp. 180-83; James Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington: GPO, 1972), pp. 397-402. For an argument about army capacity and policy, see Gen. James Van Fleet in U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings on Ammunition Shortages*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., April 1, 1953, p. 32, and Collins in *ibid.*, pp. 1-5; Collins, *War in Peacetime*, pp. 306-7; Ridgway, "My Battles in War and Peace, the Korean War," *Saturday Evening Post* 82 (Feb. 25, 1956):130; Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 91-94; and Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 50-51.

8. Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 532-33. On earlier Soviet efforts

On June 23, after giving the State Department a few hours advance notice, Malik declared on American radio that a settlement could be achieved. He explained that the belligerents should discuss a cease-fire and armistice providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the thirty-eighth parallel. Two days later, China endorsed this proposal, without renewing its earlier demands for a UN seat and Formosa.<sup>9</sup> Appearing before a congressional committee, Acheson said that Communist withdrawal behind the thirty-eighth parallel and an effective guarantee against renewed warfare would meet American military needs. Privately, Acheson explained to French officials, "we were extremely anxious to have a satisfactory settlement . . . but at the same time we were aware of the pitfalls [of] entering into any negotiations that were basically a propaganda effort."<sup>10</sup>

The administration did not want to discuss political issues—the UN seat or Formosa—with the Communists, and found support for its wishes in a special UN interpretation to negotiate an armistice as long as it was limited to military issues.<sup>11</sup> The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) favored the quest for the armistice, for they recognized the war weariness at home and the wariness of allies abroad. General Hoyt Vandenberg, Air Force chief of staff, dissented, warning, in the words of the minutes, "We are now hurting the Communists badly and . . . any respite given them by an armistice would only permit them to build up to start fighting again." He was overruled by Truman, Acheson, and the other members of the JCS.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, on June 30, acting on instructions from Washington, Ridgway publicly invited the Communists to meet with American and ROK officers to negotiate a military armistice.

since March, see George Elsey, "Memorandum for the File: Korean Peace Feelers," June 30, 1951, Elsey Papers, box 76.

9. Ernest Gross to secretary of state, June 23, 1951, Documents; text of speech printed in U.S. Department of State, *State Department Bulletin* no. 25 (July 9, 1951):45; and Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (hereafter FBIS), *Daily Report*, Moscow, June 28, 1951, p. BB1. On possible Soviet motives, see Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp. 533-34; *New York Times*, June 26, 1951, p. 1; cf., Simmons, *Strained Alliance*, pp. 198-202.

10. *New York Times*, June 27, 1951, p. 1; G. M. Godley, "Mr. Malik's Proposal," June 27, 1951, Documents.

11. Leland Goodrich, *Korea: A Study of U.S. Policy in the United Nations* (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 184; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 533-34. For background, see John Ross to John Hickerson and Dean Rusk, "Trygve Lie's Latest Thinking Concerning a Cease-Fire in Korea," June 13, 1951, Documents.

12. U. A. Johnson, "Korean Armistice" (meeting with the JCS, 10:30 a.m.), June 28, 1951, decimal file 795.00/6-2851, Department of State (source of all 795



The Communists proposed starting negotiations in about eight days, and suggested an immediate cease-fire. Perhaps they sincerely wanted a quick, permanent end to the war but, as they undoubtedly understood, a cease-fire could also benefit them, for they had suffered great losses and could use a respite to build up for a renewed attack. Suspecting such sinister motives, Ridgway easily gained Washington's speedy approval to reject the offer.<sup>13</sup>

Could a settlement be achieved? Were the Communists sincere in seeking an armistice? How long would negotiations take? UN newsmen were optimistic. They made up a betting pool, and the "pessimistic" estimate was six weeks. American leaders were suspicious and wary. Acheson privately counseled, in the words of the cabinet minutes, "we should maintain [an] attitude of skepticism."<sup>14</sup> Officials worried that there might be a stalemate over inspections or Communist efforts to broaden discussions to include political issues—Formosa and the UN seat. Gen. George C. Marshall, secretary of defense, told the cabinet that the greatest danger was "a let-down in our defense effort." As a result, the president warned publicly that America must continue to rearm itself and the West, for the Soviets had not given up their design for world conquest—an often repeated administration theme during the two years of armistice negotiations.<sup>15</sup>

At the first negotiating session, at Kaesŏng on July 10, the Communists again offered an immediate cease-fire, with withdrawal of forces to

files), Washington, D.C.; see also Johnson, "Korean Armistice" (meeting with the JCS, 3:15 p.m.), June 29, 1951, *ibid.*, decimal file 795.00/6-2951.

13. *Jen-min-jih-bao*, NCNA, July 1, 1951, *Survey of China Mainland Press* (SCMP), no. 127 (July 1-3, 1951), pp. 18-20; Ridgway to JCS, July 2, 1951, CX 66188, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); Rusk, in "Briefing of Ambassadors," July 3, 1951, Materials; Truman in Elsey, "Korean Peace Feelers," June 30, 1951, Elsey Papers, box 76; and Elsey, "Memorandum for the File," July 2, 1951, Elsey Papers, box 76.

14. Rutherford Poats, *Decision in Korea* (New York: MacBride, 1954), p. 204; Connelly, "Cabinet Meeting," July 6, 1951, Connelly Papers; see also Acheson, "Soviet Peace Proposals, Korea," June 28, 1951, Acheson Papers. According to Charles E. Wilson, defense mobilizer, "Industry is worried that we will not go ahead with the arms program if we get peace in Korea. That is not the case but [it] is a dangerous psychology" (Connelly, "Cabinet Meeting," June 11, 1951, Connelly Papers).

15. Marshall, paraphrased in L.D. Battle to secretary of state, July 6, 1951, Acheson Papers, box 66. For military preparations in case negotiations failed, see JCS 1776/240, July 13, 1951, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); preparations included expanded war in Korea, a naval blockade of China, and expanded covert war there. Truman addresses, July 4 and 23, 1951, in *Public Papers of the President: Harry S. Truman, 1951* (Washington: GPO, 1965), pp. 371-74, 404-6.

opposite sides of the thirty-eighth parallel, supervision of terms, exchange of all POWs, and removal of all non-Korean troops from the peninsula. The United States again balked. The Americans insisted upon restricting the early discussion to establishing an agenda, for they did not want to settle for the parallel, mistrusted the vague provisions for inspection, and feared that withdrawal of American troops might invite new aggression. Looking at the dispute, Ridgway concluded, "experience shows that Communists could not be expected to bargain rapidly [but] to adopt positions far in excess of what they expected to obtain."<sup>16</sup>

American intelligence suggested that the talks might fail. Moscow wanted to end the war, according to intelligence, but China probably expected "to get [a] more favorable truce than we are prepared to grant." Intelligence services thought that China might insist upon a division at the thirty-eighth parallel, rather than the more northern line that America sought, and upon withdrawal of all foreign forces, which America would resist. To dash some Communist hopes about an American withdrawal, Secretary Acheson publicly declared that America would keep troops in Korea to guarantee against renewed Communist

The British expected negotiations to be "long and difficult." Trygve Lie, the UN secretary general, believed that an armistice could be achieved, but he thought that the Soviets wanted to keep America "indefinitely tied down in the Far East, particularly by having large forces in Japan rather than in Europe or elsewhere."<sup>18</sup>

In the early days at Kaesŏng, the delegations traded insults, bickered on minor issues, and jockeyed for propaganda victories. After two weeks, on July 26, they agreed upon these key points for an agenda, which opened the way for the next stage of the dispute: 1. Fixing [a] military demarcation line . . . to establish a demilitarized zone as a basic condition for the cessation of hostilities. . . . 2. Concrete arrangements for the realization of cease-fire and armistice in Korea, including the composition, authority, and functions of a supervisory organ. . . . 3. Arrangements relating to prisoners of war.<sup>19</sup>

16. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 24-26; Lt. Col. W.F. Winton, "Memorandum for the Record," July 11, 1951, Matthew Ridgway Papers, Military History Collection.

17. Richard Neustadt to Charles Murphy, July 16, 1951, Elsey Papers; Acheson in *New York Times*, July 20, 1951, p. 2. Ridgway informed Washington that Acheson's statement "will have a positive beneficial effect . . ." (CINCFE to DEPTAR for JCS, July 20, 1951, C 67348, JCS Records, Pentagon).

18. U. A. Johnson, "British Views Regarding Post-Armistice Procedures for Korea," July 14, 1951, with excerpts from British ambassador to secretary, July 14, 1951, Matthews Files; Ernest Gross to John Hickerson, "Conversation with Trygve Lie on Korean Negotiations," July 2, 1951, Documents.

19. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 24-26; FBIS, *Daily Report*, Peking, July 16, 1951.



## DISPUTE OVER THE ARMISTICE LINE

For nearly three months, from July 26 to November 23, the two sides quarreled sharply over the armistice line. At first, the United States, already occupying some territory north of the thirty-eighth parallel, wanted a line even farther north, partly to demonstrate its victory and partly because the area was more defensible. The Communists, on the other hand, insisted upon the parallel and only slowly yielded.

The negotiations were further strained because the United States, like most bargainers, was asking for more than it expected, and the Communists were probably doing the same. While authorizing negotiators to ask for more than "the minimum acceptable positions," Washington warned its representatives at Kaesŏng "not to allow the talks to break down except in cases of failure to accept our minimum terms; not to appear to over-reach to an extent to cause world opinion to question our faith; and not to so engage US prestige in a negotiating position as to make retreat to our minimum goals impossible." Even America's minimum position, Washington forecast, "will not be easy for opponents to accept." Washington did not expect a speedy agreement and was eager to secure attractive terms, probably even at the risk of prolonging the war a few more months.<sup>20</sup>

For the American negotiators, all military officers, and especially for Admiral C. Turner Joy, chief of the delegation, these instructions were to prove frustrating and painful. Joy and his colleagues, who lacked diplomatic experience and mistrusted both diplomacy and compromise, did not want to bargain. They wanted to present a position as an immutable principle and then wait for Communist compliance. How, they periodically asked, could America compromise with the Communists, who were evil? If the Communists refused to yield, Joy and his associates were eager to terminate negotiations and escalate the war. Unlike the JCS, who shaped negotiating instructions approved by the State Department and the president, the men at Kaesŏng took a simple view of matters. They had little concern for the western alliance or public opinion at home and often seemed eager to pursue the war.<sup>21</sup>

p. AAA6, and P'yŏngyang, July 16, 1951, p. EEE1; C. Turner Joy, *How Communists Negotiate* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 27.

20. JCS to Commander in Chief, United Nations Command (CINCUNC), June 30, 1951, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45).

21. Diary of C. Turner Joy, Aug. 19, Oct. 30, and Nov. 14, 1951, Joy Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, Ca.; Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, pp. 173-74; Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 118-19, 408; George Elsey, "Memorandum for the File," July 2, 1951, Elsey Papers, box 76; Schnabel and Watson, "History of JCS," 3, pt. 2: 587-93.

When the Americans pushed for a demarcation line considerably to the north of the area then occupied by UN forces, their argument was this: given that there were sea, air, and ground battle zones, and that the United States had control well north of the parallel on the sea and in the air, the loss of such superiority should be compensated by additional territory on the ground.<sup>22</sup>

Why were the Communists intractable? Were they simply refusing to grant America a small symbolic victory? Undoubtedly, the DPRK especially resented any loss of land, in what all knew would be a nearly permanent settlement. As *Pravda* said, "The Korean people [do not want to give] the American usurpers [DPRK] territory." The Chinese representatives, like their American counterparts, seemed to dominate their Korean allies. For China, the loss of North Korean territory was primarily symbolic. But there were additional, possibly complementary explanations for Communist resistance. The Communists felt tricked—as contemporaries recognized and Acheson belatedly acknowledged—for they had good reason to expect the re-establishment of the border on the parallel. That was what Malik had specified on the twenty-third, what the Chinese had endorsed on the twenty-fifth, and what Acheson had told a congressional committee on the twenty-sixth.<sup>23</sup> Did not the United States seem to be reneging, to be demanding more to prepare the way for additional concessions?

The Communists may also have been resisting frightening American tactics—the bombing of North Korea partly to force concessions at the bargaining table. As part of Ridgway's plan "for [un]relenting pressure on Communist forces," his air force demolished parts of P'yŏngyang on July 30 and August 14. At first, the administration had withheld approval "because [singling] out P'yŏngyang as the target for an all-out strike during the time we are holding conferences might in the eyes of the world appear as an attempt to break off negotiations." Upon Ridgway's appeal, Washington relented, but insisted that there be "no publicity [about the] mass nature of this raid." The JCS even cabled Ridgway, "mass raids constitute effective utilization of air power and [we endorse] similar raids against other targets." Both Washington and Ridgway knew that the bombings would kill many civilians.<sup>24</sup>

22. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 35-37.

23. *Pravda*, quoted in Carl Berger, *The Korea Knot* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), p. 144; Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, pp. 12-13; on China, see NCNA, Aug. 15 and 16, 1951, SCMP, no. 156 (Aug. 17-18, 1951), pp. 7-10.

24. CINCFC (Ridgway) to JCS, July 21, 1951, C 67474, Matthews Files. Ridgway said that the military targets were populated and that civilians would



The bombings did not seem to soften the Communists. The two sides remained at loggerheads on the issue of the demarcation line. In early August, when the American representative refused to discuss drawing the line on the thirty-eighth parallel, the delegates stood for two hours and stared at one another. In Washington, some State Department officials wanted to accept a division at the parallel. In contrast, Ridgway wished to restate the American offer and then break off negotiations if the Communists rejected it. The administration counseled patience and firmness, suggesting that Beijing and Moscow needed time to shift on this issue. Washington did not want America to bear the onus for breaking off negotiations.<sup>25</sup>

Between August 22 and October 24 the two sides did not meet, first, because the Communists halted sessions to protest alleged American violations of the negotiating area (Kaesŏng) and, then, because the United States insisted upon moving the meetings from this Communist-controlled city to P'anmunjŏm, which could be treated as a neutral city. Even during this lengthy hiatus, Ridgway and Joy, as the latter noted, believed that "an early armistice for the Commies [was] a matter of urgency," while Washington, in contrast, was "still in doubt as to degree to which Commies desire or feel need of armistice." Concessions, Joy told a visiting Pentagon delegation, "will be equivalent to making [the] first of a series of blackmail payments." The UN's "tactical position," he argued, "is too strong for us to appease [the enemy]. Time is working for us." Joy and his associates worried

---

be warned by leaflet, the implication being that citizens would be killed unintentionally in the bombing. No one expected total evacuation of these areas; Ridgway emphasized the military need for the raid, *ibid.*, July 23, 1951; CINCFE to DEPTAR for JCS, Aug. 15, 1951, C 68962, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); Ridgway agreed not to provide any warnings of the raid. He said, "Civil populace of North Korea has been warned in the past to vacate areas in vicinity military installations and, accordingly, will be relatively insensitive to one more warning," *ibid.*, July 25, 1951. Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1961), pp. 400-402; FBIS, *Daily Report*, P'yŏngyang, July 30, 1951, pp. EEE4-5; JCS to CINCFE, July 25, 1951, JCS 97223, Matthews Files. On earlier doubts, see Col. Edwin Carns, deputy secretary, JCS, "Memorandum for the Record," July 21, 1951, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45).

25. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 38; Secretary's Staff Committee Minutes, Aug. 2, 1951, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives; CINCFE to JCS, Aug. 10, 1951, C 68672, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); JCS to CINCFE, Aug. 11, 1951, JCS 98713, "Pertinent Papers." Nine days earlier, Truman asked privately if the government knew what it would do if the negotiations succeeded ("Summary of Meeting with the Secretary," Aug. 2, 1951, Matthews Files). For evidence that the administration did want an armistice, see *ibid.*, Sept. 20, 25, and Oct. 22, 1951, Matthews Files.

that American and foreign public opinion might force the government to yield.<sup>26</sup>

On October 24, the Communists agreed to resume meetings. They soon indicated they would not insist on the thirty-eighth parallel, but would accept the line of battle at the time of the armistice as the final line. To push ahead for settlement, the JCS directed its negotiators "to offer the *present* line of contact as the armistice line" if a full agreement could be reached within a month. Washington was willing to make this small concession and to give up hopes for a line farther north to achieve a prompt armistice. Dismayed and disappointed, the American negotiators complained, charging that this proposal would undercut their earlier firmness, embarrass them, and end their usefulness. How could they retreat in negotiations after taking such a strong stand? they asked. Ridgway even pleaded for new orders. There was need for "more steel and less silk," he bluntly told the JCS. America must insist "on the unchallenged logic of our position [which] will yield the objectives for which we honorably contend."<sup>27</sup>

The pleas of Ridgway and Joy did not budge Washington. Truman and Acheson wanted a settlement, and they were more flexible than Ridgway and Joy. For Joy, the decision to offer this thirty-day period, announced in mid-November, was the major error of the negotiations. It encouraged what Joy deemed the dangerous belief that more concessions would be forthcoming and "gave the Communists what they had been seeking—a 'de facto' cease fire for thirty days which enabled them to dig in and stabilize their battle line." After that, according to Joy, "we lacked the essential military pressure . . . to enforce a reasonable attitude toward the negotiations."<sup>28</sup>

His often-accepted analysis ignored the continuing use of American air power to punish the enemy, and the administration's reluctance to engage in large-scale ground assaults, which would add casualties and deepen American bitterness with the war. He also overlooked the major concession made by the Communists in accepting that the thirty-eighth parallel would not automatically be the armistice line.

The emerging pattern, based on the evidence through November, was that the Communists were willing to compromise substantially,

26. Joy Diary, Sept. 26, 1951; *ibid.*, Sept. 20, 1951; *ibid.*, Aug. 19, Sept. 20, 1951.

27. JCS to CINCFE, Nov. 13, 1951, JCS 86804, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); Joy Diary, Nov. 14, 1951; CINCFE (Ridgway) to DEPTAR for JCS, Nov. 13, 1951, C 57216, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45).

28. JCS to CINCLC, Nov. 14, 1951, JCS 86969, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, p. 129.



but slowly, to achieve an armistice. China, still consolidating its revolution, could ill afford the costs of the continuing war, especially because it increased dependence upon the Soviet Union; the DPRK, ravaged by bombings and ground warfare, was probably also eager to end the conflict. The administration, too, was earnestly seeking a settlement and had demonstrated a willingness to compromise to end the war—ideally by Christmas. Only later would the troubling issue of repatriation of POWs stalemate the negotiations.

#### THE NARROWING OF DISPUTES

America's thirty-day offer expired shortly after Christmas, but the belligerents were still far from an agreement. For nearly five months, from late November until early April, the negotiators quarreled about the related issues of inspection of the armistice, membership on the commission supervising the armistice, rotation of troops, and reconstruction of airfields. By late April, these issues were narrowed to two—Soviet membership on the supervisory commission, which the United States resisted, and reconstruction of airfields, which the Communists demanded.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of original American fears, the issue of inspection was easily resolved. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, army chief of staff, had even doubted whether inspection was necessary and had wanted to drop the demand. Characteristically, Ridgway feared making such a concession, arguing that it would endanger his forces. He even wanted to break off negotiations if the Communists would not accept inspection. Washington allowed him to seek full inspection, but directed him to retreat if he encountered strong Communist opposition. Above all, they reminded him, he should not break off negotiations: "Any decision to cease the discussions," Washington directed, "must be made by the Communists." For Ridgway, inspection had been essential to block reconstruction of the ravaged airfields in North Korea and thus prevent the Communists from threatening America's air superiority. The agreement at P'anmunjŏm on the principle of inspection still left unresolved some major questions: Who would inspect? What would be the terms? Could the nations agree that airfields would not be repaired?<sup>30</sup>

29. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 121; Brodie, *War and Politics*, pp. 93-99; and William Vatcher, *Panmunjom* (New York: Praeger, 1958), p. 86.

30. Chief of Staff, U.S. Army (CSUSA) (Collins, signed Bolté) to CINCFE, Nov. 19, 1951, DA 87452, "Pertinent Papers"; and Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 122; CINCFE (Ridgway) to DEPTAR for JCS, Nov. 23, 1951, CX 57838, "Pertinent Papers"; JCS to CINCFE, Nov. 28, 1951, JCS 88226, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-15); Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 123; CINCFE (Ridgway) to DEPTAR for JCS, Nov. 23, 1951, CX 57838, "Pertinent Papers."

Ridgway kept warning that the United States might soon have to break off negotiations, and he continued to criticize the Washington-directed tactics of bargaining and compromising, which, he charged, made the enemy more intransigent. He warned that the prohibition against reconstruction of the airfields was, in the "unanimous judgment of the delegates [,] the key question on which the faith of the armistice hinges." Ridgway counseled that it was time to force a decision by giving the Communists two choices—an armistice or reconstructed airfields. "If his choice is [airfields]," Ridgway concluded, "then his intention [is] to take over all of Korea. . . ."<sup>31</sup>

The JCS disagreed. They did not expect renewed aggression in Korea after an armistice. They did anticipate minor "Communist violations [such as] demonstrations, threats, and equivocations. . . ." The main deterrent to major aggression, the Joint Chiefs asserted, was the threat of full American retaliation—against North Korea and, by implication, against China.<sup>32</sup>

Who was to staff the "neutral" commission that would conduct inspections? The Communists insisted upon membership for the Soviet Union. The United States refused, though it was willing to accept Soviet satellites. Why not the Soviet Union then? According to Truman's analysis, the Soviets were deeply involved in the war and therefore he could not allow them to participate on a presumably neutral commission. Truman suggested an oblique compromise—if the commission was no longer called "neutral," he would accept Soviet membership on it. Otherwise, the American position was "firm and irrevocable."<sup>33</sup>

By mid-March, with both of these issues still in dispute, American leaders considered proposing a "package" deal: yielding on the airfields, with the Communists backing down on Soviet membership and also on repatriation of POWs. This package proposal, Washington concluded, would have certain advantages: ". . . it would be to our advantage that Commies be forced to reject our proposals on several grounds and thereby emphasize their intransigence. [If the Communists move for a recess] the package deal seems to us to have advantage of having recess occur with 3 items open rather than merely the issue of POWS."<sup>34</sup>

31. CINUNC to DEPTAR for JCS, Dec. 18, 1951, HNC 588, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45).

32. JCS to CINCFE, Dec. 19, 1951, JCS 90083, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45). For earlier presidential doubts about allowing reconstruction of airfields, see naval aide (Williamsburg) to JCS, Dec. 8, 1951, DA IN 7586, and reply, Dec. 8, 1951, both in "Pertinent Papers."

33. JCS to CINCFE, Feb. 27, 1952, JCS 902160, "Pertinent Papers."

34. JCS to CINCFE, Mar. 20, 1952, JCS 904101, JCS Records, Pentagon, For



On April 28, in executive session at P'anmunjŏm, the United States unveiled its package. The Americans did not issue an ultimatum despite Ridgway's entreaties. It might decrease the likelihood of Communist acceptance and, if the offer was rejected, would raise "domestic and international expectations of prompt decisive military action."<sup>35</sup> Such an ultimatum might provoke hope and fear at home and alarm abroad, thus making more difficult the administration's struggle to defend itself from right-wing assaults in America while allaying the anxieties of allies in Europe.

American leaders did not expect total Communist acceptance. Nor were they surprised by the angry denunciations at P'anmunjŏm.<sup>36</sup> On May 2, predictably, the Communists endorsed *part* of the package—withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the commission in return for unrestricted reconstruction of airfields. On May 7, 1952, the powers announced to the world their stalemate on the POW issue. It was now the single issue separating the belligerents from an armistice agreement.

#### ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN POSITION ON REPATRIATION

The Communists insisted upon the return of all prisoners and the United States asserted a new standard—voluntary repatriation. In American terms, the issue was cast as voluntary versus forcible repatriation. For the Communists, who distrusted the American screening of POWs and disliked the results, the issue was phrased as the withholding of prisoners versus their automatic return.

How did this controversy arise? Originally conceived for propaganda and humanitarian purposes as part of the cold war struggle, the American position on voluntary repatriation had a curious history. It was advanced tentatively in the summer of 1951, criticized by some military leaders, challenged briefly by Acheson, and introduced as a bargaining position in negotiations; it ultimately hardened into firm policy when Truman and Acheson endorsed it in February 1952.

The 1949 Geneva convention on prisoners of war—which the United States had signed but not ratified—seemed, at first glance, clear

Ridgway's recommendations, see CINCUNC to DEPTAR for JCS, Mar. 11, 1952, NHC 1033, "Pertinent Papers," and for the compromise, see LDB (Battle), S/S (meeting with president), Mar. 14, 1952, Acheson Papers, box 66.

35. JCS to CINCFE, Apr. 22, 1952, JCS 906923, JCS Records, Pentagon; and Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 173, n. 76.

36. Connelly, "Cabinet Meeting," Apr. 25, 1952, Connelly Papers; and JCS chairman to CINCFE, Apr. 25, 1952, JCS 907341, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45).

37. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 172-74.

on the subject: "Prisoners of War shall be released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of hostilities."<sup>38</sup> This provision reaffirmed customary recent practice, and may have been devised to deal with such cases as those involving the Soviets, who, after World War II, had retained some German and Japanese prisoners to aid in reconstruction. Unfortunately, the provision did not deal with another case also involving the Soviets after World War II: the reluctance of many Soviet citizens who had defected to Germany's armies to be returned to their homeland. After World War II, both the United States and Britain had returned these reluctant soldiers to the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

The Korean War, involving the recently divided nations of Korea and China, created difficult problems in handling POWs. The DPRK had incorporated some captured ROK troops and citizens into its armies. And some DPRK residents, who had fought with the DPRK, wished to defect to the South. The "volunteer" troops of the PRC also included some who were loyal to the Nationalist cause and who had been pressed into service. Often these troops were placed in the front lines and therefore were more likely to surrender. The result was that some of the captured troops in UN camps did not want to be repatriated. Moreover, as the war raged back and forth across the thirty-eighth parallel, some Korean civilians had been captured along with the Communist soldiers, and the origins of these civilians were often muddled.

How many prisoners might resist repatriation? In mid-1951, when the issue first arose in secret American deliberations, there were no recorded estimates, but no American leader foresaw that the numbers would be large. By early 1952, after more careful calculations, the estimates were greater, ranging between about 10 and 25 percent of the captured troops. The most thorough estimate concluded that approximately 28,000 of 132,000 DPRK and PRC troops and about 30,000 of 38,000 civilian internees might oppose repatriation to the Communists.<sup>40</sup> Even these estimates proved far too low.

38. Quoted in U. S. Department of the Army, *Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 for the Protection of War Victims* (Washington: GPO, 1950), p. 129.

39. See *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1980, p. 34. For related materials, see "Operation Keelhaul" materials in General Archives Division, Suitland, Md.; and Cabinet Paper (46) 210, "Repatriation of Soviet Citizens," May 29, 1946, Public Record Office, London.

40. Hickey forecast that 15,900 troops "would [violently] oppose return," including 11,500 Chinese; of the anticipated 28,400 opposing return, 15,000 would be PRC troops (Lt. Gen. Doyle Hickey memo for General Hall, Feb. 19, 1952, with "Staff Study Relating to Repatriation," RG 319, Records of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, decimal file 383.6, 15, case 5/1, National Archives); John



Until the summer of 1951, when armistice negotiations were about to begin, American leaders comfortably shared the unexamined assumption that all prisoners would be automatically returned after a settlement. But on July 5, Brig. Gen. Robert A. McClure, army chief of psychological warfare, raised questions about automatic repatriation. "Many Chinese and North Korean prisoners will probably be severely punished and . . . [killed] upon their repatriation," he predicted. That would impair future American psychological warfare, McClure warned. "Inducements to surrender will be meaningless [in the future if it] results in the prisoner's death or slavery." His solution was to repatriate the Chinese to Taiwan, which was still China, and, by implication, the Koreans to South Korea. In this way, he suggested, America would not be violating accepted practices, for the POWs would be returned to their own nation, but not to the same government.<sup>41</sup>

To other military leaders, the proposal was attractive but dangerous. Both General Collins and Robert Lovett, the new secretary of defense, liked McClure's solution, but warned that it might sacrifice what they deemed the "paramount consideration"—the safe and speedy return of all UN prisoners. Ridgway also liked it, but he feared that it might set a dangerous precedent and thus allow an enemy to hold back captured Americans by claiming that they did not want repatriation. In short, as a JCS committee concluded, voluntary repatriation was attractive because it was humanitarian and aided psychological warfare, but dangerous because it violated the Geneva convention and created a precedent that might injure America.<sup>42</sup>

---

son forecast that "some 10 percent" of the POWs would resist return (U. A. Johnson in John Hickerson, "Memorandum of Conversation: Korean Armistice Negotiations," Feb. 7, 1952, decimal file 795.00/2-752). Charles Stelle to Paul Nitze, Jan. 28, 1952, Matthews Files, estimated that 3,000 PRC and maybe 30,000-40,000 DPRK troops would not want to return. Amb. John Muccio estimated for July 1951, "before much exposure to [the] reorientation program," that three-quarters of the DPRK troops had wanted to return (Muccio to secretary of state, Jan. 29, 1952, decimal file 795.00/1-2952).

41. Brig. Gen. Robert McClure to army chief of staff, "Policy on Repatriation of Chinese and North Korean Prisoners," July 5, 1951, RG 319, G-3, decimal file 383.6.

42. Army chief of staff (Collins), "Policy on Repatriation of Chinese and North Korean Prisoners," July 6, 1951, *ibid.*; Lovett for JCS, Sept. 25, 1951, JCS 2095/5, JCS Records, Pentagon; CINCFE to JCS, July 21, 1951, C 67459, RG 319, G-3, decimal file 383.6, TS, case 4; JCS 2095/3, cited in Maj. Gen. Reuben Jenkins, "Policy on Repatriation of Chinese and North Korean Prisoners," Aug. 7, 1951, *ibid.* On August 8, 1951, the JCS agreed to voluntary repatriation after all Communist-held UN prisoners were returned (Bradley to secretary of

Secretary Acheson, a widely respected attorney, decided in August that voluntary repatriation would violate the Geneva convention and probably jeopardize the return of allied POWs. The secretary rejected the proposal but not its goals. Because Acheson recognized the advantages to "psychological warfare [of voluntary repatriation] and its humane objectives," he flirted with another strategy to accomplish most of its purposes: shortly before the armistice, release the prisoners who might be injured or killed if returned. This strategy, Acheson contended, was compatible with the Geneva convention.<sup>43</sup>

Acheson's strategy was dangerous, Ridgway warned Washington. The Communists would regard it as "a breach of faith," and might end the negotiations and keep the allied prisoners. To allay Washington's fears that America might be repudiating its promises to enemy prisoners, Ridgway stressed that his psychological-warfare propaganda had "scrupulously avoided the subject of non-repatriation" and had never offered asylum. He proposed a bargaining strategy: the United States should start by seeking a one-for-one exchange of POWs; if that offer threatened to disrupt negotiations or block the return of allied prisoners, then "we are prepared to agree to any ratio up to and including all-for-all exchange."<sup>44</sup>

Ridgway's strategy did not triumph in Washington. Instead, the still-tentative position of voluntary repatriation was slowly moving toward policy. On December 10, Ridgway received his orders: start by seeking a one-for-one exchange, and if that failed, then seek an agreement allowing POWs to be screened; those resisting repatriation could stay with their captors; all the others would be sent back.<sup>45</sup> What would happen if the Communists refused these terms? So far, there was no agreement in Washington on the next step.

Why had the advice of Ridgway and the doubts of Lovett been overridden? Probably the wishes of Acheson and the inclinations of Truman were already shaping the emerging policy. Acheson may have

---

defense, "Policy on Repatriation of Chinese and North Korean Prisoners," Aug. 8, 1951, PSF).

43. Dean Acheson to George Marshall, Aug. 27, 1951, appendix to JCS 2095/4, JCS Records, Pentagon.

44. CINCFE to DEPTAR for JCS, Oct. 27, 1951, CX 55993, Matthews Files; Joy Diary, Dec. 12, 1951; cf. Department of the Army, Psychological Warfare Division, G-3, leaflet to CPV soldiers, "Choose Freedom," in William Vatcher Papers, box 12.

45. JCS to CINCFE, Dec. 10, 1951, JCS 89172, JCS Records, Pentagon; Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 138-40. For suspicions that public pressure might compel the government to modify its stand on POWs to gain return of American POWs, see JCS to CINCFE, Jan. 15, 1952, JCS 92059, JCS Records, Pentagon.



already reversed himself and decided that voluntary repatriation was compatible with the Geneva convention. He knew that Truman did not like automatic repatriation. It was inequitable, the president had told an assistant in late October, since the UN would be returning many more prisoners than it would receive. Furthermore, Truman worried about the possible killing of those prisoners who had cooperated with the UN. When the assistant pointed out that "all other matters might be settled and a final settlement might rest on the exchange of prisoners, . . . the President [retreated somewhat], saying that he certainly would not agree to any all-for-all settlement unless we received for it some major concessions which could be obtained in no other way."<sup>46</sup> Truman's inclination for voluntary repatriation would soon harden into a moral principle and firm policy.

By mid-December, Ridgway was raising new doubts about the emerging policy. "It is highly improbable," he informed Washington, "that Commies would agree to any formula which involves individual expressions of opinion (whether or not they want to be repatriated) because of extremely adverse affect that large scale defection would have on world-wide Commie prestige." Only a complete return of all military POWs would meet Communist expectations, he contended, while worrying that the promise of asylum for defecting POWs might so appeal to the humanitarian sentiments of the American people that the administration might have to stick with voluntary repatriation.<sup>47</sup> Like most of the JCS and Secretary Lovett, Ridgway wanted primarily to reclaim allied prisoners. He feared getting trapped in what seemed to him a marginal issue that might block the desired armistice.

In January, acting on instructions, the UN delegation at P'anmunjŏm introduced the issue of voluntary repatriation and stressed that the Communists had already followed this policy when they had released ROK troops at the front and allowed them to join the DPRK army. Not surprisingly, the Communists rejected a formal policy of voluntary repatriation. They undoubtedly feared humiliation when some captured soldiers refused to return home. How could the Communist leaders reject their own earlier practices, Joy asked rhetorically. Since the Chinese army was composed entirely of "volunteers," he asked, why was China so worried? Weren't the "volunteers" loyal to the PRC? The PRC delegates knew that many of the Chinese POWs were Nationalists, men not loyal to the revolution. Since the Chinese delegates could not

46. James Webb, "Meeting with the President, Monday, October 29, 1951, Korean Negotiations," Oct. 29, 1951, Korea Lot Files.

47. Ridgway to JCS, (probably Dec. 11 or 12, 1951), quoted in Joy Diary, Dec. 12, 1951; CINCLUNC to DEPTAR for JCS, Dec. 18, 1951, HNC 588, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45).

admit that fact, they presented another argument. They correctly charged the UN with trying to sway the POWs through "indoctrination"—a technique also employed by the Communists. The discussions at P'anmunjŏm speedily turned into an exercise in mutual invective.<sup>48</sup>

To strengthen the American position, the State Department belatedly sent its delegation a new interpretation of the Geneva convention justifying voluntary repatriation. Under the convention, the department maintained, the belligerents could make special arrangements on prisoners of war as long as they were not deprived of their other rights. Since the spirit of the agreement was to protect the rights of individuals, the State Department found that voluntary repatriation did not violate the convention.<sup>49</sup>

#### THE TRUMAN-ACHESON POLICY OF VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

By the end of February, Truman and Acheson had defined voluntary repatriation as an irrevocable moral principle. In so doing, they swept aside or minimized the then skimpy evidence and occasional forecasts that their decisions could mean a stalemate and might significantly prolong the war.

In mid-January, middle-level CIA, State, and Army officials concluded at a meeting, with one dissent, that the Communists would probably break off negotiations if America insisted upon voluntary repatriation. But they recommended that America should insist on this position. "A basic moral principle of political freedom was involved," they reasoned. "To give way on this point now would undermine the whole basis of psychological warfare since neither soldiers or civilians would defect from Communist rule if they thought they would be returned." These officials warned that "the crucial psychological problem would arise when the issue had to be faced: is this issue important enough to resume the war and run the risk of world war?"<sup>50</sup>

Within the State Department's PPS, at least one member, Frank Stelle, vigorously criticized the emerging American position as violating the Geneva convention and thus undermining America's claims to moral superiority. America's allies, he stressed, were eager to end the war and would not endorse the breaking off of negotiations on this issue. Nor would the American position encourage its "defector program," designed to weaken Communist states. "The critical factors in-

48. Joy Diary, Jan. 2, 1952; see also Jan. 3-14, 1952.

49. JCS to CINCPAC, Jan. 21, 1952, JCS 92490, Matthews Files.

50. Joseph Phillips, "Psychological Aspects of Negotiations on Exchange of Prisoners of War in Korean Armistice," Jan. 17, 1952, decimal file 795.00/1-1752. For a forecast of impasse, see John Hickerson, "Korean Armistice Negotiations," Feb. 7, 1952, decimal file 795.00/2-752.



fluencing defection are always local," he contended, "and thus the return of prisoners in Korea cannot be expected to have major influence on the decisions of Russians, Balkans, or Poles."<sup>51</sup>

Such counsel received little support. How can we return unwilling prisoners of war? asked Charles Burton Marshall, another member of the PPS. He argued that automatic repatriation would violate conscience, offend Congress, and repudiate the spirit of the Geneva convention. Morality, politics, and law combined, he found, to produce the same conclusion—voluntary repatriation. If necessary, Marshall proposed, "we had better hang on in Korea long enough [to force] the enemy [to concede on voluntary repatriation]."<sup>52</sup>

On February 8, Acheson urged Truman to endorse voluntary repatriation. While briefly acknowledging that this stand might block an agreement, endanger the allied prisoners, and ultimately provoke domestic and especially international opinion, he stressed the advantages. Domestic and international public opinion would initially be strong. (About sixty congressmen, led by Senator William Jenner, were opposing the forcible return of prisoners, and thus the administration would avoid a battle with Congress.) The most persuasive argument, for Acheson, was not domestic politics but morality and the cold war. "Any agreement . . . which would require [us] to use force to turn over to the Communists prisoners who believe they would face death if returned, would be repugnant to our most fundamental moral and humanitarian principles on the importance of the individual, and would seriously jeopardize the psychological warfare position of the United States in its opposition to Communist tyranny." Acheson's argument may have been designed to appeal to Truman, who regretted that unwilling Soviet soldiers had been forcibly returned after World War II.<sup>53</sup>

51. Stelle to Nitze, "The POW Issue in the Armistice Negotiations," Jan. 24, 1952, PPS Files.

52. Marshall to Nitze, Jan. 28, 1952, *ibid.*

53. Acheson, Feb. 8, 1952, with memo for the president, Feb. 8, 1952, PPS Files. For background on State-DOD-JCS discussions, see U. A. Johnson, "Position on POWs in Korean Armistice Negotiations," Feb. 4, 1952, decimal file 795.00/2-852; Acheson, Feb. 8, 1952, with memo for the president, Feb. 8, 1952, PPS Files; Johnson, "Position on POWs in Korean Armistice Negotiations," Feb. 8, 1952, decimal file 795.00/2-852; "Secretary's Daily Meeting," Feb. 6, 1952; "Resolution" (Jenner), n.d. (about Feb. 14, 1952), Ridgway Papers, box 20; "Draft Memorandum Covering Meeting of Secretary Acheson, Secretary Lovett . . . , Lloyd . . . ," n.d. (about Nov. 16, 1952), Acheson Papers, box 67. In this meeting Lovett claimed that sixty senators had signed Jenner's petition. Curiously, there is no reference to it in the *New York Times*, major periodicals, or key senatorial collections. Acheson, Feb. 8, 1952, with memo for the president, Feb. 8, 1952, PPS Files. For an earlier canvassing of issues, see Johnson to Matthews, "Questions on Korea for Discussion with the Secretary," Jan. 28, 1952, decimal

Secretary Lovett, who also attended the meeting of the eighth, still had doubts about the wisdom of Acheson's policy. The sketchy minutes suggest that Lovett was constrained and dubious, but unwilling to argue a counter-case. Splits among the service secretaries and possibly among the JCS on the issue meant that Lovett lacked adequate support in the Pentagon. More important, because Lovett was still new to office, he was probably reluctant to oppose the persuasive and powerful Acheson, who was telling the president what he wanted to hear. As a result, Lovett settled for what proved an empty concession: the president said that he was not then taking a final position.<sup>54</sup>

In mid-February, U. Alexis Johnson, the deputy assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs, and Gen. John Hull, the army vice-chief of staff, journeyed to the Far East to discuss ways out of the possible impasse on voluntary repatriation. Johnson proposed that the United States would remove from the POW lists the names of those resisting return and then offer to send all the others back. Both Ridgway and the negotiators strongly objected, charging it would violate the Geneva convention, compromise their moral position, and possibly encourage the Communists to hold back some of the allied POWs. It was "dishonorable," Joy bluntly concluded.<sup>55</sup>

There was still little evidence about Communist intentions. While the DPRK and PRC delegations had strenuously resisted voluntary repatriation, there was still the problem of interpreting their hostility. Would it be permanent? Or would the Communists yield on this matter, as they had in the autumn on the thirty-eighth parallel issue? Joy himself had wavered between predictions that the Communists would reject the American position and that the chances of agreement were fifty-fifty.<sup>56</sup> Why should Washington trust such oscillating predictions?

By late February, amid accumulating predictions that the Communists would refuse voluntary repatriation, Acheson pushed for a firm administration commitment to that position. Key allies, including Britain, Commonwealth nations, and France, had been consulted, he informed Truman, and "none . . . indicated any disagreement with our position on this question."<sup>57</sup>

On February 27, Truman conferred with Acheson, Lovett, Gen.

file 795.00/1-2852. On Acheson's attitudes in 1945, see Mark Elliott, *Pawns of Yalta* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 109-14, 247.

54. Acheson, Feb. 8, 1952, PPS Files.

55. H. M. Briggs, "Discussions Held 18 February 1952 at Munsan-ni," Feb. 19, 1952, Joy Papers, box 1; and Joy Diary, Feb. 18, 1952.

56. Briggs, "Discussions," Feb. 19, 1952, Joy Papers, box 1.

57. "U.S. Position on Forcible Repatriation of Prisoners of War," Feb. 27, 1952, Acheson Papers.



Hoyt Vandenberg (Air Force chief of staff), Adm. William Fechteler (chief of naval operations), General Hull, Deputy Assistant Secretary Johnson, and Secretary of the Treasury John Snyder to define policy. With only Admiral Fechteler dissenting, they agreed not to return unwilling POWs.<sup>58</sup> Why had Lovett and some of the others, except Fechteler, fallen in line with Truman and Acheson? No definite answer is possible, but it is most likely they did not wish to oppose the president, who had earlier indicated his wishes, and they had long liked the policy. Their earlier objections had been practical, a combination of political and military fears: that this position might block an armistice and endanger the twelve thousand allied (especially 3,200 American) POWs. Truman's authority had silenced the fears and doubts of most subordinates.

Acheson and Truman, who were the key decision makers, did not realize that this position would produce a lengthy stalemate, prolong an already costly war, weaken the support of allies, and ultimately contribute to the president's political death. They still seemed to believe that the Communists would concede, that some way could be found of achieving voluntary repatriation; perhaps selective bombing and steadfast negotiating could break the impasse. At most, they thought, they were adding only a few months, not more than a year, to the war.<sup>59</sup>

For Truman and Acheson, morality, domestic politics, anticommunism, and international politics all coalesced to produce their final decision—no forcible repatriation. Truman and Acheson judged automatic repatriation inhumane and unconscionable. They savored the prospective propaganda victory when the Communist troops refused to return home. Such a triumph would be sweet in the international struggle for the hearts and minds of neutrals, especially Asians. It would also constitute a useful political victory at home. Although the president was settling for a divided Korea, he could claim that America had both stopped Communist aggression and won a dramatic psychological victory. Beyond that, there was another important cold war dimension. If America established the precedent that prisoners would not be automatically returned, how could Communist states trust their soldiers not to defect in future wars? The fear of voluntary repatriation, as Acheson

58. Ibid.; and Diary of Hoyt Vandenberg, Feb. 27, 1952, Vandenberg Papers, box 2, Library of Congress. General Vandenberg had disagreed with this position as late as February 5 (Johnson, "Position on POW's in Korean Armistice Negotiations," Feb. 8, 1952, decimal file 795.00/2-852).

59. Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 1, track 2, pp. 8-10, Acheson Papers; *ibid.*; "U. S. Position on Forcible Repatriation of Prisoners of War," Feb. 27, 1952, Acheson Papers. The conclusions about bombing and negotiating are based upon earlier and later policy, not these documents. On expectations, see also Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, p. 152; and "Memorandum of Conversation: Korean Armistice Negotiations," Sept. 24, 1952, PPS Files.

stressed, might even deter future Soviet aggression. Just as Truman had committed troops in Korea largely to halt Communist aggression elsewhere, he was now adopting a principle to block aggression elsewhere. War and diplomacy could help accomplish the same purpose: to make the Communists, especially the Soviets, fear unleashing another attack.<sup>60</sup>

Domestic politics had not dictated—but smoothed the way for—the Truman and Acheson decision. It was what Congress wanted, which confirmed the ideological and moral positions of the president and his secretary of state.<sup>61</sup> And the alternative—automatic return of POWs—would have created problems with Congress and the electorate. But had Truman preferred automatic repatriation, he might have devised tactics to silence many potential critics. He could have cited the Geneva convention and charged them with urging America to violate it. He might have asked how a moral America could repudiate the convention. He could also have co-opted powerful congressmen by consulting them privately, warning them of a lengthy stalemate unless America returned all POWs, and stressing that the critics would have to bear the onus for a prolonged war. Would Americans, he might have asked the congressmen, support an extended war and more American deaths to block the return of some enemy soldiers who had tried to kill Americans in the war?

#### THE ROAD TO AN IMPASSE

For nearly two months, in March and April, Washington tried to avoid an impasse. In early March, Washington proposed that the unwilling POWs be removed from the lists and all the others be repatriated. This proposal would have achieved most of America's aims but protected the Communists from having to endorse the principle of voluntary repatriation. The Communists objected. In late March, they offered a minor compromise by acknowledging that some POWs might be exempted from repatriation. In early April, after an American delegate had estimated that about 116,000 POWs could be returned, the Communists implied that a settlement might be reached and suggested that the Americans screen the prisoners they held.<sup>62</sup>

60. Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 1, track 2, pp. 8-11.

61. Some administration members wondered whether they should ask Congress formally to oppose forcible repatriation and concluded that there would be minimal opposition ("Secretary's Daily Meeting," Apr. 18, 1952, Department of State). For rare opposition in the press to voluntary repatriation, see *Lynchburg [Va.] News*, Jan. 29, 1952, Joy Papers.

62. C. D. Eddleman to army chief of staff, "Status of Korean Armistice Nego-



Until the screening, the Americans privately estimated that they could return 116,000 of 132,000 POWs and 18,000 of 38,000 civilian internees. According to these rough calculations, about 28,000 POWs and 30,000 civilian internees would prefer not to return, but only 16,000 POWs and 20,000 civilian internees might forcibly resist repatriation.<sup>63</sup>

Much to the surprise of top officers in the Far East Command, however, the numbers fell drastically short of the 116,000 predicted at P'anmunjŏm. Only about 70,000 agreed to return: 5,000 of 21,000 Chinese; 54,000 of 96,000 North Koreans; 4,000 of 15,000 South Koreans; and 7,500 of 38,000 civilian internees. These results shocked Ridgway and Joy, who had known of the secret American program to indoctrinate POWs to turn them into "avowed anti-Communists," but none had foreseen such extensive hostility to repatriation.<sup>64</sup>

On April 19, the American delegation informed the Communists that only 70,000 could be returned. The chief Communist negotiator, struggling to conceal his shock and outrage, immediately moved for a recess. Resuming discussions the next day, he charged the United States with deception: "You flagrantly repudiated what you said before [when promising 116,000]." The United States, he claimed, had contrived this affair to embarrass the Communists. He accused the Americans of being in league with "the stooges" of Chiang and Rhee to coerce POWs into resisting repatriation. Full of self-righteousness, the American negotiators lashed back at their accusers.<sup>65</sup>

However, as the Americans knew, there was some, albeit limited,

tiations as of March 4," Mar. 4, 1952, RG 319, G-3, decimal file 091, Korea, TS, sec. 2; Joy Diary, Mar. 17, 1952; and NCNA, May 2, 1952, SCMP, no. 328 (May 3-4, 1952), pp. 20-21.

63. Lt. Gen. Doyle Hickey to Hull, Feb. 19, 1952, with "Staff Study Relating to Repatriation," RG 319, decimal file 383.6, TS, case 5/1; and CINCFE to DEPTAR for JCS, Feb. 3, 1952, C 66228, Army records, Military History Collection.

64. Joy Diary, Apr. 7-14, 1952; JCS to CINCUNC, July 10, 1951, JCS 95977, JCS Records, Pentagon; Haydon Boatner to army chief of staff, Nov. 20, 1975, with attachment, Boatner to Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Jan. 4, 1976, Boatner Papers, Hoover Institution; Muccio to secretary of state, Jan. 29, 1952, decimal file 795.00/1-2952. For a denial of indoctrination, see Dean Rusk in Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 1, track 2, p. 13.

65. Joy Diary, Apr. 19, 1952; Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 171-72; and FBIS, *Daily Report*, P'yŏngyang, Apr. 30, 1952, pp. EEE1-2; Joy Diary, May 9, 1952; Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, pp. 140-44; CINCFE to DEPTAR for JCS, HINC 1242, May 15, 1952, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); FBIS, *Daily Report*, P'yŏngyang, May 8, 1952, pp. EEE5-7; see also

merit to these Communist charges. Despite official American denials, some of Chiang's troops were actually used as guards in the Chinese camps and they helped establish a reign of terror there. Ambassador John Muccio later called them "Gestapos." Furthermore, one State Department official, Frank Stelle of the PPS, had earlier forecast the impossibility of securing an honest count. "The prison camps for Chinese," he had explained in January, "on the basis of firsthand reports from Departmental officers, are in effect run by the inmates themselves. The exercise of authority . . . is direct, violent, and brutal . . . , in effect, a reign of terror." America lacked the personnel and probably the will to try to correct conditions, he acknowledged, "but this should not blind us to the fact that our prisons for Chinese are violently totalitarian [and run by] thugs. . . ."<sup>66</sup>

Ridgway and Joy were aware of these problems. In fact, according to Joy, two translators who had participated in a preliminary screening had described the coercion to him. When the Nationalist leaders in the prison compound asked who wished to return to the PRC, Joy recorded in his diary, "those doing so were either beaten black and blue or killed . . . the majority of the POW's were too terrified to frankly express their choice. All they could say in answer to the question was 'Taiwan' repeated over and over again." The two translators forecast that an honest screening in the Nationalist-dominated compounds would find 85 percent, not the recorded 15 percent, seeking repatriation. When Joy pleaded for a total rescreening, Gen. James Van Fleet, commander of the Eighth Army, warned of the likely bloodshed, since he lacked adequate military police and facilities. Ridgway decided to defer the matter, and in the meantime to report the 70,000 figure to the Communists, even though (as Joy lamented in his diary) the Chinese POWs "were the nub of the question in our opinion." Joy, among others, anticipated that the Communists would reject the offer.<sup>67</sup>

The United States actually conducted some rescreening in late

"Prisoners, P'anmunjŏm, and Peace." *New Statesman*, 43 (May 17, 1952):573; and *Jen-min jen-bao*, NCNA, May 9, 1952, SCMP, no. 332 (May 9-10, 1952), pp. 6-8.

66. Oral history interview, John Muccio, 100, Truman Library. On October 24, 1952, Acheson told the UN that the interrogation of Chinese POWs "was done exclusively by United States military personnel" (Acheson, "The Truce Talks in Korea," *Harpers* 203 [January, 1953]:25). Charles Stelle to Nitze, "The POW Issue in the Armistice Negotiations," Jan. 24, 1952, PPS Files.

67. Joy Diary, Apr. 7-14, 1952. For the questions to be asked of POWs, see "Questionnaire" (for Operation Scatter), n.d., RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Suitland, Md.



April and early May. Its count of prisoners seeking repatriation increased to about 82,400–76,000 Koreans and 6,400 Chinese. Despite the pleas of the American delegation at P'anmunjŏm, however, Washington would not allow any offer of these new numbers. The numbers might prove unreliable, Washington feared, and they would certainly discredit the earlier count and thus seem to justify the Communist charges of coercion and deceit. After all, how could the United States comfortably explain that the number of repatriates had increased by 12,400?<sup>68</sup>

Would it have been possible for the United States, by employing coercion and deceit, to produce a higher number, say, about 100,000 or so repatriates, including more of the Chinese? It might have been. As Acheson later admitted, the United States had used various deceitful tactics to categorize some former soldiers as civilian returnees. Just as brutality in the camps could raise the number resisting repatriation, it might also produce more repatriates. Such a strategy could have been concealed from the American public. Probably some word of such orders would have leaked out, but the American government, had it chosen, could have denied and effectively quelled the charges. Ideology barred Washington from proposing such tactics. The president fully believed, as he soon publicly explained, "We will not buy an armistice by turning over human beings for slaughter or slavery."<sup>69</sup>

No one in Washington, so far as the records indicate, had come to the cynical conclusions of Gen. Haydon Boatner, who was soon to command the POW camps. He became a strong foe of voluntary repatriation. "Is it not crass hypocrisy for the United States," he argued, "to restrict immigration in times of peace when men are relatively free, yet take pride in the conversion of our erstwhile enemies to 'our side' by their 'free choice'? Especially when they were in fact in our prisons, subject to our indoctrination and therefore not free to make a 'free choice.'" He later told the army, "P.O.W.'s defect primarily because they believe by such actions, feigned or otherwise, their own chances for survival are increased." Upon taking over the camps, he refused to allow more prisoners to choose defection. "I was afraid we would run short of [the] number [of returnees expected by the Communists] and the armistice [would] be delayed," he later explained.<sup>70</sup>

68. Joy Diary, May 6–9, 1952.

69. Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 1, track 2, p. 12. On efforts to increase the number of repatriates, see Henry Owen to Paul Nitze, May 29, 1952, PPS Files, Truman statement, May 7, 1952, *Truman Papers*, 1952, p. 321; cf., FBIS, *Daily Report*, Peking, NCNA, May 9, 1952, pp. AAA1–5, and P'yŏngyang, May 11, 1952, pp. EEE2–4.

70. Boatner, "Prisoners of War for Sale," *American Legion Magazine*, August 1962, p. 39. Boatner to army chief of staff, Nov. 20, 1975, with Boatner to Gen.

Had the numbers accepting repatriation been larger, would an armistice have been achieved? American negotiators thought so. They believed that the Communists would have settled for about 116,000 and accepted the defection of about 16,000 troops. As Joy lamented in his diary, 70,000 was grossly inadequate.<sup>71</sup> Nor would the Communists accept the American proposal for a recount by an impartial agency like the International Red Cross. Feeling duped and embarrassed, they charged the United States with deceit, and probably realized that even an independent assessment would not raise the numbers by the desired 46,000. Both the PRC and the DPRK faced the prospect of a humiliating defeat, which would be especially painful to China, still trying to consolidate its revolution. How could the PRC comfortably explain that only a quarter of its captured "volunteer" troops wished to return home?

By May, there was strong evidence that the war could not be quickly ended. The high-level administration decisions of February, played out in the negotiations of March, April, and early May, had produced the unexpected stalemate. On May 7, in announcing the deadlock at P'anmunjŏm, Truman informed Americans, "[F]orced repatriation . . . would be repugnant to the fundamental moral and humanitarian principles which underlie our action in Korea."<sup>72</sup>

The British government publicly supported the Truman decision. Some other allies were more troubled, but their objections seldom reached the American public. In America, no mainline politician—neither Republican nor Democrat—objected and very few newspapers raised doubts. There was a rough consensus on the rectitude and necessity of the administration's position. One prominent politician, Sen. Paul Douglas, probably expressed the prevailing opinion when he declared that the return of the POWs would have meant their deaths and "would have discouraged future defections from the Communist Camp."<sup>73</sup>

Harold K. Johnson, Jan. 4, 1976, Boatner Papers. Boatner memo to Hoover Institution on "POWs in Asia," Dec. 5, 1975, Boatner Papers.

71. Joy Diary, Apr. 21, 1952. Ridgway thought that any number over 100,000 would meet the Communist expectations (CINCFE to DEPTAR for JCS, Apr. 2, 1952, C 66397, and Apr. 4, 1952, C 66397, Army records, Military History Collection; see also William Vatcher memo to Colonel Greene, July 9, 1952, Vatcher Papers, box 11).

72. Truman statement, May 7, 1952, *Truman Papers*, 1952, pp. 321–22.

73. Britain sought to bring the Commonwealth nations into line behind the United States (Gifford to secretary of state, Apr. 26, 1952, decimal file 795.00/4–2652). For other British support, see *London Times*, May 8, 1952, pp. 6–7; cf., *ibid.*, May 23, 1952, p. 7. For another hint of Allied doubts, see *New York Times*, May 11, 1952, p. E–5, "Monthly Survey of American Opinion in International



For Truman, his stand on voluntary repatriation was a reaffirmation of national morality and will. Stand up to the Soviets on this issue, he believed, and a future war might be deterred. For him, the Chinese and North Koreans were pawns; the Soviets pulled the strings in the armistice negotiations. America's actions, he declared, "in Greece and Turkey, in Berlin and Korea [are] beginning to make an impression on the Soviets [and thus could bring] world peace."<sup>74</sup> Moreover, voluntary repatriation, he and Acheson probably hoped, might even unsettle the revolutionary regime in China. Some of its armies might defect since the West could offer them freedom.

#### ESCALATING MILITARY PRESSURE TO FORCE AN ARMISTICE

Until the late spring, when negotiations foundered on the POW issue, the administration had expected an early armistice. On January 6, 1952, Acheson had confided to British leaders, "I would guess that [the armistice] would come about toward the end of January." The administration was eager to achieve a settlement on its own terms, and did not seem to worry, despite some warnings by military planners and the Nationalist Chinese, that an agreement would free the PRC to send troops to Indochina. If that occurred, Acheson concluded, America might have to bomb or blockade China. He did not anticipate committing forces to another ground war in Asia.<sup>75</sup>

In a January 1952 meeting in Washington, however, Prime Minister Winston Churchill told Truman, Acheson, and their associates that "from a military point of view an armistice was probably a mistake." The Soviet Union had proposed it, he believed, because China was

---

Affairs" (May 18, 1952, Elsey Papers) mentioned the objections of the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Paul Douglas to Truman, May 14, 1952, Official File 471B, Truman Library. In an editorial, the *New York Times* claimed, "Most of these prisoners surrendered on United Nations promises of safety and ultimate freedom" (May 8, 1952, p. 30). Ridgway had earlier informed the JCS that his command had not made such promises because they would have been a "radical departure" from the Geneva convention (CINCFE to DEPTAR for JCS, Nov. 5, 1951, CX 56642, JCS Records, Pentagon).

74. Truman to Sen. Paul Douglas, May 21, 1952, Official File, 471B.

75. Acheson, "Memorandum of Conversation at British Embassy, Sunday, January 6, 1952," Jan. 7, 1952, Acheson Papers; *ibid.*, memorandum of conversation with Amb. Oliver Franks, June 17, 1952, Acheson Papers; "Summary of Meeting with the Secretary," Dec. 18, 1951, Matthews Files; NSC 105, "Results of the Conversations between the President and the French Prime Minister," Feb. 23, 1951, PSF; Acheson-Eden minutes of conversation, September 1952, summarized in copy provided by David McLellan. French For. Min. Robert Schuman had feared that an armistice would unleash PRC troops into Indochina ("Meeting of U.S.-U.K.-French Foreign Ministers," Sept. 14, 1951, Materials).

suffering in the war. He implied that America should seize the opportunity to punish China and to gain more territory in Korea before seeking a settlement.<sup>76</sup>

The American position was more cautious but ultimately more dangerous than Churchill's. Gen. Omar Bradley, chairman of the JCS, explained to Churchill America's tactics: military success on the ground might simply provoke China to commit more troops, and thus escalate the conflict before producing another bloody impasse. But if there was no armistice or if one was achieved and China broke it, Acheson wanted Britain's agreement on bombing and blockading China.<sup>77</sup>

At the January meeting, Churchill opposed the blockade because it would not be effective. The British did not stress what was probably their main reason: they did not want to antagonize China and thus risk losing Hong Kong and their valuable trade. The British economy, strained by rearmament and still suffering from World War II, could ill afford more financial losses. America was in the awkward position of wanting strong but dependent allies, and of wanting them to take actions that, while popular in America, might also injure the alliance. These contradictions continued to plague leaders on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>78</sup>

Similar strains were visible in the British-American discussion of bombing China. The Labour government had secretly agreed in 1951 that it would sanction American bombings of Manchuria and China if they were necessary to stop massive air attacks on allied troops in Korea. So far, of course, such Communist attacks had not occurred. Now, America was contemplating bombing China to force an armistice settlement. Churchill, anticipating the outrage in Britain and the assault upon his government, seemed anxious to resist. Even when American leaders argued that they were not "talking of bombing population centers; all the targets would be military targets; and the effort would be to break up transportation and air concentrations," the British still did not grant approval.<sup>79</sup>

76. Acheson, "Memorandum of Conversation at British Embassy, Sunday, January 6, 1952," Jan. 7, 1952, Acheson Papers.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*; see also Eden to State Department (Dec.?, 1951), Bradley File, JCS Records, National Archives; Acheson to American Embassy (London), Apr. 30, 1951, Documents; Brian Porter, *Britain and the Rise of Communist China*, pp. 117-23; and Robert Boardman, *Britain and the People's Republic of China*, pp. 77-87.

79. Herbert Morrison to Acheson, May 10, 1951, Documents; Bradley to Bill [Air Marshall Sir William Elliott], Sept. 2, 1952, Bradley File, JCS Records, National Archives; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)* (Feb. 26, 1952),



At one point in the discussions, Churchill asked uneasily whether America was considering the use of nuclear weapons. He probably found little comfort in Bradley's explanation, according to the minutes, "that it was not our intention to use these bombs, *since up to the present* no suitable targets were presented." "If the situation changed in any way," Bradley acknowledged, "a new situation would arise." In America, as Churchill undoubtedly knew, a majority of the citizens favored using atomic bombs in Korea. Such action could have destroyed NATO, whose citizens lived in the shadows of the Soviet nuclear arsenal; fear of a Soviet reprisal against NATO might have shattered the alliance.<sup>80</sup>

Both the British government and its citizens were far more cautious about escalation than were their American counterparts. How could the British or other Europeans endorse the bombing of China unless it was essential to save allied troops in Korea? Bombing China to force the Communists to accept the American position on repatriation was dangerously close to MacArthur's scheme in 1951—one that had alarmed allies and unsettled the administration. For Acheson, Truman, and Bradley, the discussions with Churchill were probably valuable as a way of assessing British tolerance for possible American tactics. Those tactics would have to be shaped to avoid frightening major allies.

"The situation in the Far East is becoming more and more difficult," Truman complained in his diary on January 27. "Dealing with communist governments is like an honest man trying to deal with . . . the head of a dope ring." Echoing General Vandenberg's earlier fears, Truman concluded that the Chinese might have opened negotiations in mid-1951 to gain a respite in the war while they imported materials and resupplied their front lines. Truman poured his frustration into his diary and savored extreme tactics. He wrote of giving Moscow an

vol. 496, cols. 968-78. For Australian fears, see J. H. S. Shullaw, "Question of Possible Retaliatory Action against Manchurian Airbases in Event of Large-Scale Enemy Air Attack," Apr. 18, 1951, Matthews Files. Acheson "Memorandum . . . at British Embassy. . . , January 6, 1952," Jan. 7, 1952, Acheson Papers. Herbert Morrison had warned earlier of provocative American actions against China and stated that the USSR was keeping China out of the UN. He didn't want to help cement the Sino-Soviet alliance and feared that if the Allies became more involved in the Far East, "the Soviets would likely start trouble elsewhere" (meeting of the U.S.-U.K. Foreign ministers, Sept. 10, 1951, PSF).

80. Acheson, "Memorandum . . . at British Embassy. . . , January 6, 1952," Jan. 7, 1952, Acheson Papers (emphasis added). Answering "Do you think the United Nations forces should or should not use the atom bomb on enemy military targets?" in a poll of Nov. 11-16, 1951, 41 percent said "should," 10 percent a "qualified should," and 33 percent said "should not" (George Gallup, ed., *The Gallup Poll* [New York: Random House, 1974], 3:1027-28).

ultimatum that America would blockade China and bomb Manchuria unless Russia and China stopped aiding the DPRK forces. Although he knew that such a plan was politically reckless because it would split the NATO alliance, he indulged himself further, in the safety of his diary, and even fantasized about the atomic bombing of Moscow, Leningrad, Beijing, Shanghai, and other major Soviet and Chinese cities.<sup>81</sup>

The need to maintain the NATO alliance compelled the administration to refrain from openly spreading the war beyond Korea in 1952. As a result, the State Department vetoed a JCS plan in February for an air force and navy "sweep along the China coast." In March, when Adm. Arthur W. Radford, commander of the Pacific fleet, proposed a similar plan, Ridgway, probably influenced by the State Department veto, opposed it. In April, a JCS planning committee flirted with "the tactical use of atomic weapons, the use of Chinese Nationalist forces, [and] commando operations and *acceleration* of guerrilla operations [against China]." Their aim was to break the stalemate and coerce the Communists into yielding, but most of their tactics were rejected as too dangerous.<sup>82</sup>

With the negotiations at P'anmunjŏm at an impasse, Truman poured out anger into his diary. He wrote a self-righteous diatribe, as if it were a script for his negotiators in Korea: "Now do you want an end to hostilities in Korea or do you want China and Siberia destroyed? . . . You either accept our fair and just proposal or you will be completely destroyed." Truman never used this angry ultimatum.<sup>83</sup>

The air force was eager to apply pressure to force a settlement. In early spring, it began campaigning to bomb the large North Korean power complex near the Yalu. When Ridgway resisted because the power complex served the domestic Korean economy and its destruction would "have no appreciable effect on hastening Communist agreement to an armistice on our terms," Gen. O. P. Weyland, the air force commander, appealed to Washington. The bombing would weaken the North Korean war effort, he contended, produce "a serious psychological effect and may impress N. Koreans with the price they are

81. Truman Diary, Jan. 27, 1952, PSF; and Bernstein, "Truman's Secret Thoughts," pp. 33, 44.

82. Gen. Marshall Carter to Matthews, Feb. 12, 1952, with Adm. W. M. Fechteler, "Proposed Sweep along the China Coast," Feb. 8, 1952, decimal file 795.00/2-1252; Webb to Acheson, "Re: JCS Proposal for Show of Force in Far East," Feb. 14, 1952, *ibid.*; JCS 1776/287, Apr. 3, 1952, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45) (emphasis added).

83. Truman Diary, May 18, 1952, PSF; Bernstein, "Truman's Secret Thoughts," pp. 32, 44.



paying for their continued recalcitrance"—a position reaffirmed by General Vandenberg, the air force chief of staff.<sup>84</sup>

Upon replacing Ridgway, Gen. Mark Clark, the new American and UN commander, speedily agreed to bomb the power complex—a decision sanctioned by the JCS, Secretary Lovett, and Truman. As a result, in late June, American planes bombed the key Suiho plant near the Yalu and ten other hydroelectric installations, thereby creating a two-week blackout in North Korea.<sup>85</sup>

The bombings caused problems in the European alliance. Britain's Labour Party, fearing an expansion of the war, savagely attacked Churchill's government, which narrowly averted censure. Not only had the State Department failed to inform Britain, which Acheson speedily admitted was a lapse of courtesy, but European critics feared that these attacks might drive China to break off negotiations and widen the war. In America, in contrast, the bombings were widely popular and briefly assuaged many critics, who sharply inquired why the installations had been exempted from bombing until then.<sup>86</sup>

The bombings were part of America's expanded naval and air war designed to force concessions from the Communists. On the ground, the opposing armies were stalemated in mostly small battles. The two sides were roughly matched and the United States could not push ahead, except with high casualties. The American aim was to reduce its casualties,

84. CG FFAF (Tokyo) to HQ USAF, Apr. 29, 1952, VCO 118 CG, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); air force chief of staff to JCS, "Destruction of Electric Power Installations in North Korea," May 1, 1952, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45). For other thinking, see Maj. Gen. C. P. Cabell to Bradley, "Future Action in Korea in Case Negotiations Break Down," May 13, 1952, *ibid.*

85. JCS to secretary of defense, "Removal of Restriction on Attacks against Yalu River Hydroelectric Installations," June 19, 1952, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); JCS to CINCFE, June 19, 1952, JCS 911683, "Pertinent Papers." For the whole record, see Cabell to chairman, JCS, "Chronological Record of Communications on Hydroelectric Plant Bombings," June 24, 1952, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-45); Futrell, *U.S. Air Force in Korea*, pp. 451-52. American officials told members of foreign governments that the bombing was "a military operation for military reasons and any political effects are only incidental" ("Memorandum of Conversation: Briefing of Foreign Government Representatives and Korea," June 24, 1952, Materials; cf., FBIS, *Daily Report*, P'yŏngyang, July 7, 1952, pp. EEE2-3).

86. Porter, *Britain and the Rise of Communist China*, pp. 126-29; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 656-57; "Monthly Survey of American Opinion in International Affairs," June, 1952, Elsey Papers, box 66; Acheson to secretary of state, June 26, 1952, Materials; JCS to CINCFE, July 3, 1952, JCS 9127, "Pertinent Papers"; "Monthly Survey of American Opinion on International Affairs," June, 1952, Elsey Papers.

to make the war more palatable at home, but still to punish North Korea and compel a settlement. In line with this strategy, the air force pounded cities and villages, usually after giving civilians warnings, and thus carried on a policy of "psychological warfare," according to the official history. On May 8, the day after the deadlock at P'anmunjŏm was announced, the air force launched what was then its largest attack of the war against the ancient city of Suan, a key military depot. Soon there were larger attacks. On July 11, August 4, and August 29, the air force bombed P'yŏngyang, hitting military targets and killing civilians. "I have always felt that a forceful action is more conducive to agreements with the Communists than a softer approach," Clark told Washington.<sup>87</sup>

Was the bombing carefully calibrated to events at P'anmunjŏm? The evidence is skimpy because so many records remain classified. The attacks of May 8, promptly following the acknowledgment of the stalemate, and those of July 11, immediately preceding a new American offer, do seem carefully orchestrated to events at P'anmunjŏm. The bombing of July 11 preceded by two days America's offer, after a rescreening, to return 82,400 POWs (not the originally estimated 70,000).<sup>88</sup>

The Communists rejected this offer, but suggested they would compromise by retreating from 116,000 to 100,000 or 110,000, if the total included all the Chinese. China, eager to end the war but perhaps fearful of embarrassment, was offering a modest concession—one that sacrificed DPRK soldiers. Perhaps the DPRK was even more anxious for an armistice and willing to pay this small price.<sup>89</sup>

87. Futrell, *U.S. Air Force in Korea*, pp. 480-84, and see p. 484 for State Department fears of publicity about "mass-bombing of military targets in or near heavily populated areas." *New York Times*, May 9, 1952, p. 1; Futrell, *U.S. Air Force in Korea*, pp. 481-84. On July 10, Clark cabled Bradley, "I agree that we should include at least one other target to eliminate press attention solely to P'yŏngyang, and have so arranged" (Clark through Bolling to Bradley, July 10, 1952, 1063, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea [7-31-50]). On July 3, Clark had delayed the bombing of P'yŏngyang because of the "delicate stage" of negotiations, but decided to go ahead if there was no improvement (Clark to Bradley, July 7, 1952, 1206, *ibid.*).

88. Clark to Bradley, July 7, 1952. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 270-75.

89. CINCFE (Clark) to DEPTAR for JCS, July 18, 1952, HNC 1406, "Pertinent Papers." The compromise at 110,000 was also implied on the 6th (CINCFE [Clark] to DEPTAR for JCS, July 8, 1952, HNC 1374, "Pertinent Papers"). In June, Ambassador Gifford had reported that China was seeking only 100,000 or 110,000 POWs, including 20,000 from the PRC, and would allow others not to return home (Gifford to secretary of state, June 18, 1952, Matthews Files). See also McClurkin to Allison, "Panikkar's Discussion with Chou En-lai on the Deadlock on Repatriation of Prisoners of War," June 18, 1952, and "Panikkar's Dis-



Had the July bombing produced this slight retreat? The evidence is mixed. Indian officials charged generally that American bombings impaired the chance for a settlement. According to the Indians, America's June bombing on the Yalu, rather than intimidating the Communists and producing concessions, had killed an important Chinese compromise offer—the creation of a neutral nation commission to determine which prisoners did not want repatriation. After the bombings, according to the Indians, the Chinese decided not to present this compromise, lest they appear to be yielding to force. American officials, in turn, denied publicly that China had been ready to compromise. Although these officials may have been correct, they failed to admit that there had been a brief flurry of secret optimism in Washington during the Sino-Indian talks of mid-June.<sup>90</sup>

The American bombing strategy was cruel, but possibly deft. "Make maximum possible use available air . . . in attacks upon all military targets in North Korea," the JCS ordered, presumably with White House approval, but "avoid public statements [about the attacks] so that Communist prestige is not . . . so seriously engaged as to make more difficult ultimate Communist agreement to acceptable armistice." In line with this strategy, when Premier Chou En-lai visited Moscow in mid-August, partly to request additional Soviet military and economic aid, George Kennan, then ambassador to the Soviet Union, suggested that the United States should increase its air attacks. Anything that could be done "to frighten" the Chinese and to increase their demands on Russia would be good," he concluded. If this strategy of coercion was combined with some conciliatory gesture, Kennan counseled, the Soviet Union might push for a cease-fire. He thought such a settlement would seem more attractive to Stalin than increased assistance to China. This advice produced the massive raids of August 29-30 on P'yŏngyang.<sup>91</sup>

cussion with Chou En-lai on the Question of Repatriation of Prisoners of War," June 18, 1952, Materials. For British optimism about a settlement, see Acheson to secretary, June 27, 1952, Materials.

90. *New York Times*, July 19, 1952, p. 2; cf. JCS to CINCFE, July 15, 1952; Chester Bowles to secretary of state, July 24, 1952, Materials; *New York Times*, July 20, 1952, sec. 4, p. 2; JCS to CINCFE, June 23, 1952, JCS 911932, and July 12, 1952, JCS 913418, both in JCS Records, Pentagon.

91. JCS to CINCFE, Aug. 8, 1952, JCS 915579, JCS Records, Pentagon. Kennan, in Futrell, *U.S. Air Force in Korea*, pp. 487-88. For agreement, see Amb. Robert Murphy to secretary of state, Aug. 27, 1952, Materials; and CINCFE (Clark) to DEPTAR for JCS, Aug. 27, 1952, C64277, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-15). In July, the CIA concluded, "Despite the capability to continue the war in Korea, we believe that internal economic and political considerations are probably exerting pressure on the Chinese Communists to

The escalated air and sea war did not soften the Communists at the negotiating table. In the short run these attacks probably improved morale and united the people against their common foe—America. Also, the governments of both China and North Korea may have feared yielding to intimidation. Concessions wrung through coercion could teach the Americans the wrong lesson: that blackmail can succeed. With the reduction in the ground war, the chief victim was not China, whose territory remained safe, but North Korea. China, however, seemed to shape the Communist policy at P'anmunjŏm.<sup>92</sup>

On September 29, General Clark summarized the military situation for Washington: "We confront undemoralized [enemy] forces, far superior in strength, which occupy excellent, extremely well-organized defensive positions, in depth and with sufficient logistic support." Clark hoped that the administration would greatly strengthen his forces, authorize the use of nuclear weapons, allow the bombing of Manchuria and China, employ two of Chiang's divisions in Korea, greatly expand the ROK army, and let America win. Like MacArthur, Clark chafed under the constraints of limited war and promised that an unrestrained American military operation in the Far East could accomplish what the negotiators at P'anmunjŏm had failed to achieve—a settlement on American terms.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the earlier Acheson-Truman flirtation with bombing China, the administration was not going to yield to Clark's entreaties and risk shattering the Western alliance that America had gone to war, or so it thought, to save. But Clark did win on one measure. The administration agreed to expand the ROK army. Until October, the Truman administration had been moving slowly in this direction, but when the Republican Party exploited this issue in the campaign of 1952, the government speeded the program. If the ground war continued, it would become, as Republican candidate Dwight Eisenhower had suggested, a conflict where "Asians [would] fight Asians" while, as the air force stressed, the United States conducted its pulverizing bombing of North Korea.<sup>94</sup>

conclude hostilities" (CIA, NIE, 55/1, "Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea," July 30, 1952, PSF).

92. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 381-82; and Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, pp. 12-13.

93. CINCUNC to JCS, Sept. 29, 1952, CX 56022, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (3-19-15); CINCUNC to DEPTAR for JCS, Sept. 1, 1952, C 54499, JCS Records, Pentagon; Mark Clark to Joe [Collins], Oct. 9, 1952, RG 319, decimal file 091, Korea (10-9-52); cf., FBIS, *Daily Report*, Moscow, Nov. 25, 1952, pp. AA1-2.

94. JCS to CINCFE, Oct. 30, 1953, JCS 922607, "Pentagon Papers"; Bradley



Secretary Lovett had outlined part of this military strategy to the cabinet: "If we stay firm [on the POW issue] we can tear them up by air. We are . . . hurting them badly. . . . If we keep on, tearing the place apart, we can make it a most unpopular affair for the North Koreans. We ought to go right ahead."<sup>95</sup> American leaders believed that military force was the handmaiden of diplomacy. Success at P'anmunjŏm could be won by heavy bombing.

#### MORE HARDENING IN AMERICAN POLICY

Though Truman was not a candidate in the 1952 presidential election, the war was a major issue and a settlement would have greatly assisted the Democrats. Yet neither Republicans nor Democrats criticized the administration for its insistence on voluntary repatriation. Within America, there was a comfortable consensus that the nation, as Truman had argued, could not surrender this moral principle and send the POWs to their death.<sup>96</sup>

American politicians would not trade lives for a truce. In a war against an evil enemy, as plain citizens and their leaders interpreted the Korean conflict, such compromise seemed immoral. Once the issue had been phrased publicly as a matter of moral principle, there could be no retreat. Although the war was unpopular, and major politicians quarreled about whether America should have intervened in 1950, none suggested yielding to Communist demands in 1952 and abandoning voluntary repatriation. The major dispute was whether the administration should expand the war, possibly to China, to compel a settlement.<sup>97</sup>

Probably there was only one line of argument that might have found wide electoral support for abandoning the American position on voluntary repatriation. That argument would have required rephrasing the issue in terms of American lives versus enemy prisoners. Should America sacrifice more of its young men, a politician might have argued, to save enemy prisoners who had tried to kill American boys

to secretary of defense, "Augmentation of Wartime Republic of Korea Army and Marine Corps," Sept. 26, 1952, *ibid.*; cf., FBIS, *Daily Report*, P'yŏngyang, Nov. 24, 1952, pp. EEE10-13. *New York Times*, Oct. 3, 1952, p. 1; cf., FBIS, *Daily Report*, Peking, Nov. 26, 1952, pp. AAA2-3.

95. Connelly, "Notes on Cabinet Meeting," Sept. 12, 1952, Connelly Papers.

96. Surprisingly, the *New York Times* index, the major periodical literature, and the relevant files at the Truman and Eisenhower libraries, as well as the papers of Taft, Connelly, Dulles, Barkley, and H. Alexander Smith reveal no dissent. Cf., T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 600, and William Winter to William Vatcher, Aug. 17, 1952, Vatcher Papers, box 1.

97. Ronald J. Caridi, *The Korean War and American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), pp. 181-239.

on the battlefield? Should Americans have to remain in captivity in Communist camps to save these enemy POWs? Such arguments were not unreasonable. The latter argument had actually shaped the doubts of military leaders in late 1951, when they opposed making voluntary repatriation a firm policy, but no major politician argued a similar case in 1952. Perhaps the absence of such debate testifies to the intimidating power of the Jenner-led group of congressmen, who had insisted on voluntary repatriation, and to the administration's capacity to shape the dialogue with an already sympathetic electorate.

Strangely, politicians did not urge the administration to release the unwilling repatriates and thus present the Communists with a fait accompli. Perhaps such counsel, especially during an electoral campaign, would have risked inviting charges that the politician was besmirching morality and urging America to violate international law. Unlike the Vietnam War, when legitimacy broke down under the accusations of official deceit and American war crimes, the Korean War did not puncture the widespread belief in America's morality.

No major candidate offered a proposal for achieving an armistice without America's retreating on the POW issue. But in late August, Vincent Hallinan, the Progressive party presidential candidate, suggested a solution: agree on a cease-fire, exchange the willing prisoners, and then negotiate on the others. A few days later, the president of Mexico proposed a similar solution, with one major difference—the unwilling repatriates, rather than staying in POW camps in Korea (as in Hallinan's proposal), would go to neutral nations and even be allowed to work until a postarmistice conference settled their status.<sup>98</sup>

Through much of September, the State Department, on the one side, and the JCS and the Defense Department, on the other, wrangled over whether to back these proposals. Many in the State Department found them attractive. They might end the war and secure the return of allied POWs, which military leaders had earlier defined as their "paramount purpose." From Moscow, Ambassador Kennan, noting the American Communist party's support for Hallinan's plan, cabled, "consider move excellent. . . . Seems to me it would be hard for Soviets to wiggle out of it without letting down Amer Commies badly." Whether or not it won Communist acceptance, the plan warranted American support, some advisers concluded. If the Communists endorsed it,

98. Progressive Party press release, Aug. 24, 1952, American Labor Party (hereafter ALP) Papers, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. Hallinan's position received almost no notice in the American press, for this proposal, like the rest of his campaign pronouncements, was virtually blanked out. For a minor exception, see *New York Times*, Sept. 7, 1952, p. 46. JCS to CINCPAC, Sept. 9, 1952, JCS 917927, Matthews Files.



thought Paul Nitze, director of the PPS, the war would be over. If the proposal split the Soviets and Chinese, as Kennan suspected, it would still be politically valuable. At minimum, as State Department advisers stressed, acceptance of either proposal would have propaganda value, for America would establish that it was being flexible and seeking an agreement to end the war.<sup>99</sup>

General Clark opposed such ideas. He denied that they would divide China and the Soviet Union, and outlined a military-political case that Secretary Lovett, the service secretaries, and the JCS unanimously endorsed. They all feared that a truce without settlement of the POW issue would encourage the Communists to strengthen their forces in Korea and then reopen the war against a reduced American army, depleted by demands to "bring the boys home." The military conclusion was firm: better an armed stalemate, in which America could keep bombing North Korea, than a fragile truce. Bombing might achieve the desired terms in the long run; an uneasy truce could mean defeat.<sup>100</sup>

Were military leaders in Washington sincere in their judgment that a settlement without agreement on the POW issue was very dangerous? Or did they seize on this argument because they were reluctant to allow a settlement, which would mean a reduced military budget, the acceptance of a divided Korea, and the end of any chance of a military victory? Put simply, were they contriving or relying upon arguments to block a settlement for other purposes? (Clark was undoubtedly unhappy that victory would be impossible, but he was deeply and sincerely worried that the Hallinan or Mexican proposal would jeopardize his forces.) Lovett, the service secretaries, and the JCS were not seeking military victory, and most, if not all, were eager to end the war with an armistice. They did not fear that an armistice would greatly weaken domestic support for the military. They knew that the defense budget would be slightly reduced, but they anticipated that large military budgets would endure and that America, freed of

99. Quoted in JCS to CINCFE, Aug. 29, 1952, JCS 917260, JCS Records, Pentagon; Nitze to Matthews, "Korean Armistice Proposal," Sept. 3, 1952, PPS Files; Henry Owen to Nitze (draft), "Further Thoughts on the Proposed Presidential Statement," Sept. 3, 1952, *ibid.*

100. CINCUNC (Clark) to DEPTAR for JCS, Sept. 1, 1952, C 54495, JCS Records, CCS, decimal file 383.21, Korea (4-19-45). Clark stressed "firmness in negotiations to be supported by continued heavy bombing attacks" (CINCUNC [Clark] to DEPTAR for JCS, Sept. 1, 1952, C 54499, JCS Records, Pentagon). Lovett, "Memorandum for the Record: Meeting with the President on Korean Situation," Sept. 15, 1952, RG 330, Records of the Secretary of Defense, Correspondence Central Section, CD, decimal file 092 (Korea).

this war, would be better able to meet its military commitments elsewhere.<sup>101</sup> They expected that Eisenhower, as the likely new president, would maintain America's global commitments and keep the military relatively strong. The enervating war, with its strains upon the NATO alliance, may, for these men, have actually constituted a greater threat than Congress to the military budget. In short, by now they wanted an armistice.

On September 15, Truman met with the high-ranking members of Defense and the JCS to discuss the State Department's stratagem (the Mexican proposal). They argued, according to Lovett's summary, "that any sign of weakness on our part and any evidence to negotiate indefinitely merely convinced the Commies we would make further concessions." An armistice without agreement on the POWs would be dangerous. And the Mexican proposal might even delay an agreement by encouraging the Communists to believe that more concessions would be forthcoming. Truman agreed, in Lovett's words, that there was "no real prospect of getting an armistice other than to persist in our present course of action and increase the military pressure in so far as possible. . . ."<sup>102</sup>

During the week, Acheson tried to resolve matters with the JCS and the Defense Department, but he found their arguments—basically a restatement of Clark's—weak and unconvincing. Any armistice, Acheson contended, would allow the Communists to build up military strength and reopen the war, and spawn demands in America for bringing the soldiers home. Unlike military leaders, he did not think that an armistice without an agreement on repatriation was more likely to provoke a renewed Communist attack. Most important, he was sure that the Communists would not accept the Mexican proposal, and thus, for him, the issue was not whether to take a small risk to end the war, but, rather, whether the United States should endorse the Mexican proposal and gain the international propaganda benefits of appearing flexible and eager for peace.<sup>103</sup>

The odds of the Communists endorsing the Mexican proposal were "about one in a thousand," Acheson concluded. "The Chinese could

101. On the stretch-out decision on military spending, see Edward Flash, *Economic Advice and Presidential Leadership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 90-97.

102. Lovett, "Memorandum for the Record: Meeting with the President on Korean Situation," Sept. 15, 1952, RG 330, CD, decimal file 092 (Korea).

103. U. A. Johnson, "Memorandum of Conversation: Future Tactics in Korean Armistice Negotiations," Sept. 17, 1952, PPS Files; and Fechteler, "Memorandum of Conversation: State-Defense Conference on Korean Armistice Negotiations 17 September 1952," PSF.



not possibly accept," he explained, because "the prisoners who were not exchanged would be sent to other countries," and, thus, if there was no agreement on repatriation, they would stay there to work and settle as immigrants. In effect, then, the Communists would have only two equally unacceptable choices—to endorse voluntary repatriation and lose the prisoners, or to refuse and lose the prisoners.<sup>104</sup>

Acheson and the military were not arguing about how to achieve an armistice, he emphasized, but about how to achieve a propaganda victory and avoid a diplomatic defeat. With the Mexican proposal attracting the support of America's allies in the war, Acheson did not want to reject it and offend them. The proposal would also meet other needs. When the Communists rejected it, Acheson forecast, the United States could then halt negotiations. It would be what he labeled "the best possible platform" to justify a recess. Like the military leaders, Acheson believed that a recess would persuade the Communists of American determination and might compel them to concede.<sup>105</sup>

Because presidential advisers could not agree on tactics, they brought the issue to Truman. All agreed that the issue was important enough for the president to make the final decision. Acheson did not push vigorously for his stratagem, perhaps because he already knew the president's inclination. Predictably, on September 24, Truman reaffirmed his earlier decision: no armistice until the POW problem was settled. Toughness, he implied, would chasten the Communists, while any concession might invite aggression.<sup>106</sup>

At P'anmunjŏm, on September 28, five months after the package proposal of April, the United States delivered its final offer: Let the POWs choose, possibly under the scrutiny of a neutral nation commission or the International Red Cross, whether they wanted to go home. The Communists, as anticipated, promptly rejected these terms. Ten days later, the delegations met briefly, hurled accusations, and the Americans announced an indefinite recess and withdrew.<sup>107</sup>

104. No author, no title, n.d. (about Sept. 16), begins, "The Secretary, in considering the question . . ." Acheson Papers.

105. Johnson, "Memorandum of Conversation: Future Tactics in Korean Armistice Negotiations," Sept. 17, 1952, PPS Files.

106. Johnson, "Memorandum of Conversation: Korean Armistice Negotiations," Sept. 24, 1952, PPS Files. A briefing paper for Acheson noted that only 53 percent (against 61 percent in July) of Americans favored bombing across the Yalu. Twenty-eight percent favored withdrawal, 30 percent were for holding the line, 35 percent were for taking the offensive (44 percent in July). (U. A. Johnson, "Brief for Discussion with the President," Sept. 24, 1952, PPS Files).

107. Maj. Gen. C. D. Eddleman to army chief of staff, "Summary of Actions

Negotiations would not resume at P'anmunjŏm for six months, and then under a new president, who would also make oblique nuclear threats to coerce concessions.

#### THE SOVIETS HELP MAINTAIN THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE AT THE UN

During its last few months, the Truman administration struggled to block other nations from trying to end the war by compromising on voluntary repatriation. Acheson, having lost the dispute in Washington over tactics, faced a difficult task: protecting the president and his administration from embarrassment in the UN.

Many of America's allies were eager to achieve an armistice. They wanted to withdraw their troops and, like the neutrals, they resented the continued bloodshed and feared that the conflict might escalate. None publicly challenged American motives or raised cynical questions stressed by the harried American Left: how could America napalm many North Korean civilians but sincerely worry about the POWs? Wasn't America itching for a war with China, or employing the arguments of humanitarians to disguise the quest for a cold war victory?<sup>108</sup>

In early October, acting behind the scenes at the UN, Acheson briefly rallied support to the American cause. He lined up twenty nations—mostly from NATO and the Commonwealth—to cosponsor with the United States a resolution asserting "the rights of all prisoners of war to an unrestricted opportunity to be repatriated and [to] avoid the use of force in their repatriation." But this support quickly crumbled when V.K. Krishna Menon, the shrewd Indian delegate who mistrusted America, promoted a compromise similar to Hallinan's—an armistice, exchange of willing prisoners, and establishment of a commission to decide the future of the others. Evasive and flexible, Menon kept his proposal fuzzy; for some time, he refused to put it in writing, presumably so he could exploit ambiguities and avoid conflicts. Although Menon seemed a masterful diplomat to many, Acheson viewed him as deceitful, no doubt because the proposal's main features, no matter how muted or disguised, were unacceptable to the administration. The POWs who refused repatriation would remain captives until they accepted a return to their homelands. That was their only route out. "In this way," Acheson complained, "the principle of repatria-

with Respect to Armistice," Oct. 6, 1952, RG 310, G-3, decimal file 091, Korea, TS. On earlier orders, see Truman to CINCPAC, Sept. 28, 1952, DA IN 188571, Matthews Files, and on the meeting of the 28th, CINCPAC (Clark) to DEPTAR for JCS, Sept. 28, 1952, Z 23092, Matthews Files.

108. Progressive Party press releases, Oct. 21 and 26, 1952, ALP Papers.



tion and the negation of force both appear to be observed," while, in fact, each was circumvented. It was, Acheson informed the president, "as they say in strike settlement lingo, [giving] us the words and the other side the decision."<sup>109</sup>

Acheson aimed to hold the fragile alliance together, to block any UN effort to direct the armistice negotiations, and even to win UN endorsement of the administration's policy. Such a victory would provide some comfort at home for the politically discredited administration, and would also destroy, he claimed, Communist expectations for a UN-dictated compromise. For Acheson, there were two enemies at the UN: the Soviets, who sought to drive wedges between the allies, and the Indians, who seduced America's allies into an unprincipled conspiracy.<sup>110</sup>

On November 10, when the Soviet representative, Andrei Vishinsky, announced that the Soviets would "not budge" on the prisoner issue, Acheson concluded, happily, that Menon's venture would quickly collapse and that key allies would return to the American fold. Instead, as Acheson later complained, the allies' hopes survived Vishinsky's declaration: "The Canadians thought the speech was not as bad as it might have been; the Australians, that the Chinese wanted an armistice but the Soviets did not."<sup>111</sup>

The group of twenty allies was crumbling. The secretary of state wanted a prompt showdown in the General Assembly, but first he had to deal with his key allies, whom he later dubbed "the conspirators." To win back the British and Canadians, he sent for reinforcements—American military leaders. On November 16, at Acheson's behest, Lovett and Bradley presented their well-rehearsed arguments that had persuaded Truman in September.<sup>112</sup>

Even when aided by Bradley and Lovett, Acheson could not bring his disgruntled allies back into line. They were tired of the war and wanted a settlement. The POW issue no longer commanded their sympathy; the United States seemed arrogantly intractable. Diplomacy

109. Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 699-702; Acheson to president, Nov. 15, 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67.

110. "Message for the President from the Secretary of State," Oct. 25, 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67.

111. Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p. 701.

112. Ibid.; and draft memo of Acheson, Lloyd conversation, Nov. 14, 1952, Acheson Papers; J. B. M[atthews], "Memorandum for the Record: Armistice Negotiations in Korea," Oct. 28, 1952, RG 319, G-3, decimal file 091, Korea; "Draft Memorandum Covering Meeting of Secretary Acheson, Secretary Lovett, General Bradley, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd . . ." n.d. (Nov. 16, 1952), Acheson Papers, box 67.

required negotiations and flexibility, they maintained, while America offered intransigence. The British and Canadians were eager to circumvent the principle of voluntary repatriation, without openly repudiating it, and the Indians were offering an attractive route. Acheson seemed a moral extremist to these allies.<sup>113</sup>

The Truman administration feared that Eisenhower's recent election would lead both the unhappy allies and the Communists to expect more flexibility from the new administration. After all, with his campaign promise of "I will go to Korea," Eisenhower had implied that he would win a settlement whereas Truman and Acheson had achieved only a stalemate. Meeting with Ike on November 18, Truman and Acheson persuaded him to join forces with them by publicly endorsing voluntary repatriation.<sup>114</sup>

Although gaining support from Ike, Acheson was unable to persuade the delegates of the powerful Commonwealth countries to support the American position, so he engaged in an end run. Visiting Canada in mid-November, he pleaded his case before the prime minister and cabinet. America's UN ambassador, Ernest Gross, in what may have been a related tactic, informed the press that there was a major split on this issue between the United States and Britain. Probably it was a "leak" calculated to bring the British back into line. To add more pressure, Acheson had warned allies that "divisions among us on this essential matter would bring grave disillusionment in the United States regarding collective security, which would not be confined to Korea but would extend to NATO and other arrangements [including military aid] of the same sort."<sup>115</sup>

In a curious way, the role of the Korean War in alliance politics had become reversed in two years. America had entered the war largely to save Europe from Soviet aggression. Now, by late 1952, Acheson was warning American allies that, despite the strains the war created in their countries, they must stick with the United States and continue it, or risk an American reappraisal of commitments to Europe. He was

113. Ibid.; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p. 702; Stairs, *Diplomacy of Constraint*, pp. 263-68; Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 2, track 1, pp. 7-9.

114. Acheson, "Memorandum of Meeting at the White House between President Truman and General Eisenhower," Nov. 18, 1952, PSF; Sen. Alexander Wiley, in *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 1952, p. 1; and Acheson, "Meeting with the President [on] Korean Resolution in UN," Nov. 5, 1952, Acheson Papers, box 67.

115. Acheson, statement before Canadian Cabinet, Nov. 22, 1952, Acheson papers, box 67; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 703-4; *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 1952, p. 1; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 703-4; Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 2, track 2, p. 1. The inference about the purpose of the "leak" is mine; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p. 702; draft memo of Acheson, Lloyd conversation, Nov. 14, 1952, Acheson Papers.



not arguing that the government wished to take punitive measures, but, rather, that the electorate and Congress, unhappy with the defection of allies, might force a reduction of commitments. He was not entirely wrong. The allied effort to secure peace on terms deemed immoral in America could impair collective security and slash the aid and military budgets. It was not peace per se, but peace on the wrong terms, that threatened the West.

Under these pressures the Canadians were sliding back into the American fold but the British still lingered outside. Upon Acheson's appeal, Truman empowered him to act at the UN without Britain, and thus to risk widening the rift, in an American-directed effort to kill Menon's proposal. But that became unnecessary, when, on November 24, much to the surprise of all, Vishinsky drove the allies back together by publicly condemning the Indian resolution. At the UN, Vishinsky insulted the Indian government and Menon, and rejected his proposal as "designed to . . . perpetuate [the war]." The next day, China also refused Menon's terms.<sup>116</sup>

Rebuked by the Communists, Menon tried to withdraw his resolution, but Acheson, now savoring victory, blocked him. Gaining the backing of Latin American states, the secretary amended the resolution to provide that a commission would free the prisoners about four months after the armistice. Acheson thus transformed the resolution into what Menon had struggled to avoid—an American restatement of its own position. Acheson pushed for a vote. On December 3, with only the Soviet bloc opposed, the General Assembly approved it, fifty-four to fifty-five, and the PRC and DPRK quickly rejected it. America had achieved the political victory the administration desired, but was not closer to an armistice.<sup>117</sup>

The Soviet Union had actually aided the United States in patching together its torn coalition at the UN. Did the Soviets miscalculate? Or did they fear that the principle of voluntary repatriation would weaken their armies by encouraging mass defections in future wars? Did the Soviets fear that the Chinese might yield, and had Vishinsky sought to bring China back into line? Might China have acceded if the Soviets had not acted? Firm answers are impossible. But we know that the Chinese had already indicated—in May and July—their willingness to

116. Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 703, 705; Jules Davids, *U.S. in World Affairs, 1952* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 340; NCNA, Nov. 28-29, 1952, SCMP, no. 462 (Nov. 29-30, 1952), pp. 1-9. The Soviets charged America (Bradley) with atomic blackmail (FBIS, *Daily Report*, Moscow, Nov. 26, 1952, pp. AA13-14).

117. *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1952, p. 1; and Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p. 705.

compromise and allow nonforcible repatriation of DPRK troops if all PRC "volunteers" were returned. That suggests that China had its own reasons for resisting both the American position in the summer and the revised Indian resolution in November, and that the Soviet action, at best, may have stiffened the PRC's resolve. And the DPRK, this skimpy evidence suggests, would have liked to end the war, even at the cost of losing about 42,000 soldiers who would go south.<sup>118</sup>

What would have happened if Vishinsky had not sunk the Menon initiative? Would America's key allies have bolted to support it, and embarrassed the United States? Probably not. Their aim was to change American policy, not to humiliate the administration and risk even greater American intransigence. If Acheson had continued to resist Menon's compromise, and Vishinsky had not scuttled it, the NATO and Commonwealth powers probably would have returned, albeit reluctantly, to the American fold. Then they probably would have maneuvered to avoid any UN vote on the issues of repatriation and America's unilateral conduct of armistice negotiations.

#### THE MAINTENANCE OF PRINCIPLE

Truman was able to stick to his position on voluntary repatriation. In January and February 1952, he had not foreseen the price he would pay for this course: a stalemated war, many American casualties, disgruntled allies, domestic cries for a bolder foreign policy, a painful defeat for his party, and his own repudiation. That winter he had acted in a manner that seemed politically popular at home; he had avoided a clash with Congress, a battle with the Republican party, and a split within his own party. Perhaps more important for him, victory on the repatriation issue had promised a valuable cold war triumph, which might also deter further Communist aggression by encouraging the defection of their armies. For Truman, domestic and international political considerations had coalesced with the principles of morality and humanitarianism.

He had been optimistic that the Communists would soon yield. He was not trying to prolong the war to bleed China or North Korea. He was not trying to prolong the war to remilitarize Europe or to

118. Cf., Simmons, *Strained Alliance*, pp. 222-23. Kennan later claimed that "Stalin was terrified of the cosmopolitan wing [of his party], and I think he was always frightened that that wing would find something in common with Menon and his people" (Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 2, track 2, p. 7). See also John Gittings, *The World and China, 1922-1972* (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 192; cf., FBIS, *Daily Report*, P'yŏngyang, Nov. 26, 1952, p. EEE1; Vatcher memo for Colonel Greene, July 19, 1952, and Vatcher to General Harrison, July 28, 1952, Vatcher Papers, box 11.



maintain a high defense budget; at times, in fact, he worried that unhappiness with the war and inflation could injure his foreign and defense policies.<sup>119</sup> But when the likelihood of stalemate became strong in the spring, he was personally and politically locked into his position on voluntary repatriation. He would not repudiate what he deemed a moral principle. Nor did Acheson, the adviser Truman most trusted, counsel a reversal. Both men wanted this cold war victory. They believed it might prevent further aggression. And Truman probably feared a backlash at home if he openly retreated and compromised on the POW issue. Hostility in America could have impaired his foreign policy and encouraged attacks on the mutual security program.

Had Truman wanted to reverse himself, and had he felt hemmed in only by domestic politics, he might have maneuvered to co-opt his critics and to gain the freedom to change policy. He could have floated some trial balloons—speeches by administration members suggesting flexibility on repatriation—to test the political winds. To push key GOP members toward flexibility, he might have met with them, warned of the prospect for a prolonged war, and implied that they would have to bear the onus for this policy. He did not try these tactics, largely because he did not want to reverse his position. The GOP attitudes confirmed his own.

Ultimately, during the administration's last seven months, it relied upon bombing to coerce the Communists into a settlement. Truman and his associates sought to wed military force and diplomacy. The air war, by blasting North Korean cities and industries, might compel the Communists to yield. By holding down American casualties, this strategy reduced demands in America for withdrawing from the conflict or expanding it to China. Despite the Truman administration's hopes, however, the strategy of bombing did not produce the desired Communist tractability.

While Americans chafed at the continuing war, few asked if the issue of voluntary repatriation justified the prolonged war. Did the maintenance of what General Boatner deemed a dubious standard justify the 125,000 UN casualties, including 32,000 Americans, in the last fifteen months of the war?<sup>120</sup> From a less chauvinistic position, even fewer asked, Should either side have refused to yield and thus caused the hundreds of thousands of casualties and deaths, both military and civilian, in those last fifteen months?

Truman and Acheson never had any doubts about the wisdom and

119. Acheson to Nitze, Sept. 17, 1952, Korea Lot File; Truman to John Snyder, Oct. 13, 1952, PSF; and Truman to Robert Lovett, Oct. 4, 1952, PSF.

120. Hermes, *Truce Tent*, pp. 500-501.

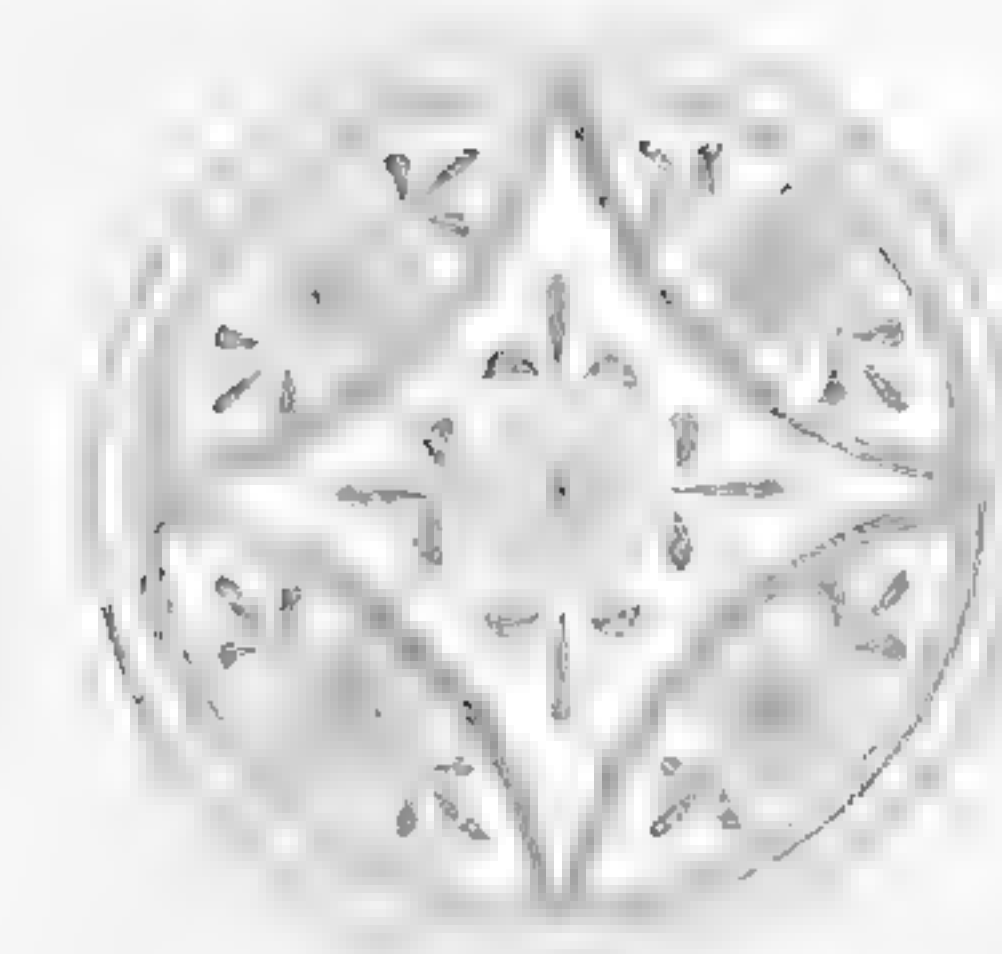
rectitude of their policy. As a result, they should have found satisfaction in President Eisenhower's unwavering insistence on voluntary repatriation. Ultimately he secured the victory on voluntary repatriation that Truman had felt denied. On July 27, 1953, after Stalin's death, America's nuclear threats, and America's escalation of conventional bombing, the warring powers signed an armistice agreement that allowed voluntary repatriation and, in effect, maintained the division of Korea. Ultimately 82,500 POWs (including 6,700 Chinese) chose repatriation, while about 50,000 (including 14,700 Chinese) decided not to return to their Communist homelands.<sup>121</sup>

Celebrating the armistice, John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's secretary of state, publicly echoed the earlier hopes of Truman and Acheson. The establishment of voluntary repatriation, Dulles asserted, was an "important . . . principle." Dulles explained, "The Soviet leaders fear that, if they launch a major war of aggression, many of their soldiers and airmen would seize the opportunity to desert [because] of the right of enemy prisoners to enjoy political asylum. . . . As a result, from now on, the Red Armies will be less dependable as tools of aggression. We have increased the prospect of peace and added to the security of our nation."<sup>122</sup>

121. Truman and Walter Lippmann, among others, believed that the Eisenhower administration had made greater concessions (question in interview with Bradley, Mar. 30, 1955, Post-Presidential File, Truman Library; and Walter Lippmann, "Today and Tomorrow," *Washington Post*, Aug. 24, 1956, p. 19). They were wrong, as Acheson pointed out (Acheson to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Sept. 27, 1954, and Acheson to Adlai Stevenson, Dec. 20, 1955, Acheson Papers). John Foster Dulles to president, May 22, 1953, Dulles-Herter series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans.; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years, 1953-1956: Mandate for Change* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 181-82; Sherman Adams, *First-Hand Report* (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 48; cf. Friedman, "Nuclear Blackmail," pp. 75-91; "The Attack on the Irrigation Dams in North Korea," *Air University Review* 6 (Winter 1953-54): 40-61; Futrell, *U. S. Air Force in Korea*, pp. 623-29; oral history interview, Mark Clark (1972), 13, Military History Collection; Hermes, *Truce Tent*, p. 515. Between July and October, 1952, the United States released about 38,000 civilian internees, including some POWs, who, according to Acheson, were deceitfully reclassified to permit their release (Princeton Seminars, Mar. 14, 1954, reel 2, track 1, p. 12).

122. Dulles address, Sept. 2, 1953, Department of State press release, Sept. 1, 1953, Korea Lot File.





## Records in the National Archives Relating to Korea, 1945–1950

JACK SAUNDERS

THE AMERICAN STUDENT OF RECENT KOREAN HISTORY SUFFERS MANY HANDICAPS. The division of the Korean peninsula into two competing political, social, and economic systems has resulted in the North being closed off to the outside world and scholarly access restricted in the South. The Korean War ravaged Korea's historical heritage and to a large extent diverted interest away from the study of the American role in the five years preceding it. The history of Korea during this half decade, the history of a people aspiring to reclaim national integrity, cannot be appreciated without a comprehensive understanding of U.S. policy, its implementation, and its impact on post-World War II Korea. In pursuing this understanding, the American student is no longer at similar disadvantage. The records documenting U.S. involvement in Korea in the years following World War II are increasingly available to the public in the National Archives of the United States.

The National Archives, in addition to housing the heart of the documentary heritage of the U.S. government, is the headquarters for the agency of the General Services Administration entitled the National Archives and Records Service (NARS). Of interest here are the Office



of the National Archives and the Office of Federal Records Centers. The former preserves, inventories, and provides reference service for the records of the U.S. government selected for permanent preservation. The latter office controls the records centers around the country that house federal agency documents that are used infrequently but are nevertheless necessary to the functioning of government.

The most important requirements for doing research in the National Archives are time and patience. The National Archives is a cultural institution created primarily as a result of the interest of the scholarly community, and it endeavors to be responsive to its needs. However, the growth of its holdings over the past decade, accompanied by a tremendous jump in the number of researchers utilizing its facilities, has not been matched by any comparable growth in staff. Today, it is impossible for even the most experienced and knowledgeable member of the National Archives staff to know the system inside out, and thus allow researchers to make maximum use of their time. This paper, it is hoped, will ameliorate this problem for anyone interested in Korea between 1945 and 1950 by surveying records from this period with a particular emphasis on the General Archives Division (GAD). Descriptions of each body of records include estimates of volume, explanations of arrangement, current information on accessibility, and general evaluations of the usefulness of the records.

#### THE MODERN MILITARY BRANCH

The Modern Military Branch (MMB) is a subdivision of the Military Archives Division and has custody of military records that originated after 1939. In general, these records are from the Washington headquarters of the military services.

#### *Record Group 218*

*Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1942-53.* The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) represent the views of the defense establishment to the president and coordinate implementation of U.S. defense policy. The JCS files relating to Korea show the development of military occupation policy based largely on reports from Gen. John R. Hodge, the commanding general of the U.S. Army Forces in Korea (USAFIK) and Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the supreme commander for the Allied powers (SCAP). They include papers expressing the viewpoints of other policy-making bodies, such as the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC). The JCS records consist of policy drafts, comments on the drafts, and policy statements; messages received from military commands; memoranda, reports, and correspondence. The development of JCS policy toward Korea is of particular

interest because of the JCS's failure to provide General Hodge with adequate guidance concerning U.S. policy, particularly in the early stages of the occupation. The lack of policy guidance was compounded by the unique position of Korea as an occupied area. While Japan had been an enemy nation, Korea had not, but its military government was subordinate to MacArthur, who was for the most part preoccupied with the problems of Japan. Consequently, liberated Korea received less consideration than did defeated Japan.<sup>1</sup> One historian commented that "The situation in Korea, like that of Japan, necessitated considerable policy expression at the local level, for which prompt and timely guidance was essential. The difference between Japan and Korea was that General MacArthur was largely his own policy-expressor while General Hodge was given broad and ambiguous responsibilities which were greatly dependent upon more timely and responsible clarification from his superiors."<sup>2</sup>

The records of the JCS for the 1942-53 period are segregated into two sets of files—classified and declassified. In each of these they are arranged by period as follows: 1942-45; 1946-47; 1948-50; and 1951-53. Each period has a geographic file, arranged alphabetically by country, and a general decimal file. The volume of records relating to Korea totals approximately forty-six archive boxes, and about half of those have been declassified.<sup>3</sup> The volume of unclassified records for the four periods, beginning with the earliest, is two, four, seven, and ten archive boxes respectively. The general decimal file is simply a subject file in which the various subjects are assigned decimal numbers according to a filing system adopted in 1917, The War Department Decimal File System.<sup>4</sup> This filing system is easy to understand, but sometimes

1. E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951), p. 76.

2. C. Leonard Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea: War Policy and the First Year of Occupation, 1941-1946" (draft manuscript produced under the auspices of the Center of Military History, Washington, D.C.), p. 475. Dr. Hoag had official status as a Center of Military History historian while doing his research and thus had access to most of the military records discussed in this paper. His manuscript, and especially its citations, proved extremely useful in preparing this survey.

3. This paper will measure volume of records as so many archive or FRC boxes. An archive box is a cardboard box capable of storing four linear inches or one-third cubic foot of records. Most of the records in the National Archives building are contained in these boxes. An FRC box is an eleven by fifteen by twelve-inch cardboard box capable of storing about one cubic foot of records. Most of the records in the Federal records centers are in FRC boxes.

4. *The War Department Decimal File System: A Subjective Decimal Classification with a Complete Alphabetical Index for Use of the War Department and the United States Army* (Washington, D.C., 1913).



difficult to use because it was not originally designed to apply to civil affairs and military government records. It is impossible to estimate the volume of records in the decimal file relating to Korea; however, some files that one might assume are in the geographic file are in the decimal file.

The JCS files have been reviewed for declassification and no additional review will take place without a special request under Executive Order (EO) 11652 or under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). EO 11652, issued in 1972, included a provision encouraging agencies to declassify documents requested by the public. It provides for mandatory review of documents that have been classified ten years or more. If a request for declassification is turned down by the agency that originated the document, a requester may appeal to that agency's review committee, and if again unsuccessful, to the Interagency Classification Review Committee. EO 11652 is still in effect, although many researchers prefer to request declassification under the FOIA.

The FOIA was enacted by Congress in 1966 and is considered "milestone legislation that reversed long-standing government information practices."<sup>5</sup> In 1972, the House Government Operations Committee determined that "efficient operation of the Freedom of Information Act has been hindered by 5 years of foot-dragging by the Federal bureaucracy."<sup>6</sup> In response, Congress amended the 1966 law over the veto of President Ford. The FOIA of 1975 allows the public to request access to any existing records of the executive branch of government that do not fall under any of the designated exempt categories and that the requester can identify sufficiently to enable the government to locate the records. It also establishes a ten-day time limit within which the government must respond to the request.

When the National Archives is unable to comply with a request for access under the FOIA, the most frequent reason is that the requested

5. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Government Operations, *A Citizen's Guide on How to Use the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act in Requesting Government Documents*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., II. Rept. 95-783, p. 5 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977). This is a comprehensive guide, but it does not mention that the Privacy Act does not apply to records accessioned into the National Archives. It applies to active government records. NARS is itself responsible for protecting the privacy of individuals whose names appear on formally accessioned records. For further information, see NARS General Information Leaflet No. 27, "General Restrictions on Access to Records in the National Archives of the United States" (General Services Administration, 1976). This leaflet contains a summary of NARS restrictions on access that illustrates the general scope and content of NARS policies on access when national security is not a consideration.

6. Ibid.

document falls under one of the two following categories of records exempted by the act: documents that are appropriately classified in the interest of national security and documents that contain information about the private lives of individuals. In protecting the privacy of both American and foreign citizens, the National Archives staff has the difficult task of "balancing the interests between disclosure and nondisclosure. The public's right to know must be weighed against the individual's right to privacy."<sup>7</sup>

When the records are reviewed by NARS Declassification Division, all documents that cannot be declassified are removed from the files. In the case of the JCS files, classified documents can be identified by using the listing of papers that accompany every folder. In the case of all other record groups discussed in this paper, any document that cannot be declassified is removed from the box and replaced by a withdrawal card that gives enough information to identify the document, both for refiling when it is declassified and for allowing researchers to request that it be reviewed for declassification.

The screening of documents for information that, if released, would invade individuals' privacy is usually the responsibility of the NARS staff member who is helping the researcher. In the case of the JCS records and most of the other record groups in the MMB relating to operational planning, policy implementation, and policy development, the problem of access to records containing personal information about living individuals is not too serious.

### *Record Group 165*

*Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Civil Affairs Division, 1943-49.* The Civil Affairs Division (CAD) of the War Department's Office of the Chief of Staff was directly concerned with all aspects of civil affairs and military government. The records of the CAD reflect the many interests of the division. It was the central clearing house for all army civil affairs actions and was represented on many civilian and military advisory boards, including the SWNCC. It had responsibility for preparing civil affairs plans and policies, advising military commanders on occupational activities, assessing the success of the military in the implementation of civil affairs plans, and receiving and distributing civil affairs reports.<sup>8</sup> The CAD records are the most com-

7. Ibid., p. 12.

8. Departmental Records Branch, Administrative Services Division, The Adjutant General's Office, *Guide to Civil Affairs and Military Government Records in the Adjutant General's Records Centers, Part I: General Description of Records* (Washington D. C., 1952) pp. 4-5. This guide is outdated, but it contains some very useful information on the structure of military agencies and the arrangement



plete collection of documents relating to planning, development, and operation of military government.<sup>9</sup>

There are six-hundred archive boxes of CAD records and these are well indexed. Most relate to U.S. occupational activities in Japan, Germany, Italy, and Austria; the exact volume of documentation relating to Korea is difficult to determine because the records are arranged according to the War Department decimal file system. Lists of documents included in the records are filed at the beginning of each period into which the CAD files are divided. These lists are also arranged according to the War Department's decimal file system. Many of the CAD documents relating to Korea are filed under decimal 014 for Korea in approximately five archive boxes. Documents not found under decimal 014 can be located using the document lists. The CAD records have been reviewed for declassification and do not normally require screening.

In 1946 the Operations Division (OPD) of the War Department General Staff, in a reorganization of the military establishment, became the Plans and Operations Division (POD) under the assistant chief of staff, (G-3, operations). In general, the POD prepared army logistical and operational plans. In the area of military government and civil affairs, the POD shared with the CAD the responsibility for planning and appointed a full-time liaison officer to work with the CAD.

The records of the OPD and the succeeding POD are arranged and indexed by time period according to the War Department decimal file system. Many of their documents relating to Korea are filed under the decimal 091 for Korea; others are scattered throughout the files under other subject decimals. An index to each period exists, consisting of cross-reference sheets that give short summaries of each document. The index for each period is located at the beginning of the records for that particular period. Under decimal 091 are cross-reference sheets for all documents on Korea that appear in the subsequent period, whether or not they are filed under 091.

The volume of records is difficult to estimate, but a conservative guess is that at least half of the substantive records relating to Korea are filed under decimals other than 091. Under 091 there are approximately five archive boxes for all periods. These operations records

of their files. Perhaps its most useful feature is Appendix 1, entitled "Selected Army Decimal Numbers Used in Filing Papers Relating to Civil Affairs and Military Government Matters." Anyone wishing to use any of the general decimal files arranged according to the War Department decimal file system in doing research on civil affairs or military government-related topics might want to ask a knowledgeable NARS staff member to make available a copy of this guide.

9. Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea," p. 479.

have been reviewed for declassification and do not normally require screening.

### *Record Group 165*

*Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, American-British Conversation Files, 1942-46.* The American-British Conversation files, better known as the ABC files, are the designation of the records of the Strategy and Policy Group (SPG) of the OD. In *Washington Command Post*, Ray S. Cline writes: "In matters of joint or combined strategic planning and policy, the most important collection of World War II records in Washington (with possible exception of the JCS records) is the Strategy and Policy Group file." He continues, "It is especially valuable because OPD drafts, comments, and related papers appear with the JCS, CCS [Combined Chiefs of Staff], and SWNCC papers."<sup>10</sup> In addition, the ABC files reflect the fact that all communications between CAD and field commanders had to be cleared with the SPG.<sup>11</sup>

The ABC files are arranged according to the War Department decimal file system, and decimals relating to Korea are scattered throughout. Many are filed under decimal 014 for Japan. They have been reviewed for declassification and screening is usually unnecessary.

### *Other Records*

Other bodies of records in the MMB of interest to the student of Korean history are: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Decimal files, 1917-54 (Record Group 407); Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Army, Central Correspondence file, 1917-51 (Record Group 335); Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, Office of the Secretary, 1937-45 (Record Group 107); Records of the Army Staff, Office of the Chief of Staff, 1942-50 (Record Group 319); and Record of the Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, 1941-46 (Record Group 226). Although the bodies of records in the MMB already discussed are more important than any of the above, these do contain valuable documentation. In general, all but the last of these contain documentation relating to Korea similar to that found in JCS, CAD, POD, and ABC files. The records of the Adjutant General's Office (TAGO) and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) are both massive collections of documentation. The former is of particular interest because of the broad variety of records in its files; the latter

10. Ray S. Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division, United States Army in World War II* (Washington, D. C.: Center of Military History, GPO, 1951), p. 383.

11. Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea," p. 16.



because of its detailed information on Korea and its leaders both during and in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

The decimal files of the Adjutant General's Office, known as the AG central files, have over 18,000 archive boxes of records and over 5,000 rolls of microfilm. Arranged according to the War Department decimal file system, these records consist of correspondence and other documents originating from all divisions of TAGO in the War Department General and Special Staffs and the Office of the Secretary of the Army. The AG central files have been reviewed for declassification and can usually be made available without extensive screening.

The OSS Research and Analysis Branch records in the MMB include a library file of intelligence documents created by OSS units and other U.S. intelligence-gathering agencies. This file consists of approximately 284,500 documents indexed by over 900,000 index cards. The index is comprehensive, with cards on intelligence documents relating to Korea through 1945 and even a few for 1946. One problem with access to this file is that each document stands alone. The index cards are arranged by country and thereunder by subject, but the documents themselves are filed by number without any grouping by subject or geographical area. Thus, the retrieval of each intelligence document involves a separate search. In addition, although most of the records are declassified, they require careful screening.

#### THE DIPLOMATIC BRANCH

The Diplomatic Branch (DB) of the Civil Archives Division has records relating to U.S. diplomacy, including all State Department records. Records relating to Korea between 1945 and 1949 are in the decimal file and the special collections of the State Department. The department has not yet released records of subsequent years, nor delegated to the National Archives the authority to declassify them.

##### *Record Group 59*

*General Records of the Department of State, Decimal File, 1915-49.* From 1910 to 1963, most of the records of the State Department were indexed according to its decimal filing system, which is similar to the War Department's.<sup>12</sup> Documents in the file include instructions to and dispatches from diplomatic and consular officials, notes between the State Department and foreign diplomatic representatives in the United States, memoranda prepared by department officials and correspondence with other U.S. government departments, private firms, and

12. A detailed explanation of the State Department filing system can be found in *Classification of Correspondence*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1939), available on NARS Microfilm Publication M600.

individuals. The 9,000 archive boxes of the 1945-49 records are filed together as one of the decimal file's five-year segments. They have been reviewed for declassification and screening is not usually necessary except for documents filed under decimals that identify them as containing biographical information.

There are three indexes to the decimal file for this period: (1) a subject index with cards arranged by decimal; (2) a name index in which the correspondence with individuals or private organizations is arranged alphabetically; and (3) a source index in which correspondence with U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, with foreign governments or representatives of foreign governments, and with other U.S. government departments or agencies is arranged alphabetically. The subject index is the most comprehensive. The easiest way to use it is to check the cards filed under a few basic decimal numbers that should identify documents pertaining to one's research topic. Cards filed under these numbers inevitably include cross references to documents filed under other decimals. For example, under the decimal 985.00 (internal affairs, Korea) one can also find cards listing documents filed under 711.95 (U.S.-Korean relations).

The State Department's decimal file contains a comprehensive collection of documents of enormous importance in the study of U.S. diplomatic relations. It is not, however, without its shortcomings. One archivist on the GAD staff sharply questioned the research value of State Department records in general and the decimal file in particular: "The most common complaint registered about the records of the State Department is that they contain little significant documentation: very little which establishes policy or delineates factions or alternatives to the course of action the United States pursued. The criticism is especially valid for the central files [decimal file] which were a dumping ground for all sorts of useless trivia of government."<sup>13</sup> While this criticism is perhaps excessive, members of the staff of the DB are quick to point out that the decimal file is not without drawbacks. Although comprehensive, it often never received copies of critical State Department documents. Department officials were sometimes reluctant to see their office files dispersed in the decimal files. Some of these shortcomings are compensated, however, by the DB's special collections.

##### *Special Collections of the Department of State*

In recent years, the DB has accessioned various groups of records that concern U.S. foreign relations but are not part of the State Depart-

13. James Edward Miller, "Federal Records of World War II: The European Resistance," October 1974, p. 20.



ment's decimal file. In some cases these records include duplicates of documents in the decimal file, but mostly they consist of unique records maintained as individual office, reference, or working files. They are generally referred to as special collections, and are arranged according to the purposes for which they were created or maintained.

Records documenting the development of U.S. policy regarding the military occupation of Korea and the establishment of an independent government in South Korea can be found among the 147 archive boxes of the SWNCC and the State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Committee (SANACC) for 1944-49. The SWNCC was established in 1944 to coordinate U.S. foreign and defense policy and was renamed after the passage of the National Security Act of 1947. The SWNCC and SANACC files include minutes and agenda of meetings, committee decisions, reports, memoranda, and correspondence. The basic research aid for the files is a box list. The SWNCC and SANACC files have been reviewed for declassification and screened for privacy protection. They are now being edited and filmed by Scholarly Resources Inc. of Wilmington, Delaware, which will soon market them as a microfilm publication.

Sixteen archive boxes of files of the American Delegation, U.S.-USSR Joint Commission on Korea (JCK) and seven archive boxes of records relating to the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) are maintained together as one of the special collections in the DB. The JCK was established as a result of the Moscow Agreement of December 27, 1945, to facilitate the formation of a provisional Korean government. It first met on March 20, 1946. When an impasse was reached in 1947, the United States laid the question of Korean independence and unification before the UN. UNTCOK was established on November 14, 1947 to report on elections in Korea. The JCK records include minutes, agenda, and transcripts of meetings, messages, correspondence, and reports. The UNTCOK records include documents on preparations for Korean elections, intelligence summaries, messages, reports on the conduct of the election and on Korean public opinion, press releases, and numbered special reports. These records have been reviewed for declassification and no extensive screening of the files is necessary. The finding aid for the JCK and UNTCOK records is a folder list.

In 1947 President Truman sent Gen. Albert Wedemeyer on a mission to China to gather information on political conditions there. During his mission, Wedemeyer gathered data relating to conditions in China and Korea, and four of the eleven archive boxes in the special collection of records of the Wedemeyer Mission contain materials on Korea. Two of these contain data on political and economic conditions in Korea and reports on U.S. military government activities there, and

the other two are full of original letters and memorials sent by Koreans to General Wedemeyer while he was in China. There is a folder list to aid in locating these records. They have been reviewed for declassification and no extensive screening is necessary.

#### THE GENERAL ARCHIVES DIVISION

The records on Korea in the MMB and the DB emphasize the development of U.S. military and diplomatic policy toward Korea in the post-World War II era; in GAD they emphasize the implementation of that policy. During the early stages of the U.S. occupation of Korea, General Hodge, and the tactical unit commanders and military government officers serving under him, lacking adequate guidance from Washington, made the decisions that later became official U.S. policy. They based their decisions on their conception of what was happening in Korea. Reports on the Korean political, social, and economic situation can be found in military unit records at all levels, from the smallest tactical or civil affairs unit to the general headquarters of the Far East Command (FEC), or even to the intelligence files of the War Department in Washington. These and other records relating to Korea are in GAD, and they should be of great interest to anyone studying Korea, not only because of the richness of the documentation, but also because so few researchers have studied them to date.

GAD receives its name from the great diversity of the records in its custody. Among its 400,000 cubic feet of records are some of virtually every major U.S. government agency, from the 1790s to the 1970s. These records are the "overflow" from the National Archives building. GAD is located in the Washington National Records Center in the federal complex in Suitland, Maryland, but is not part of the system of federal records centers (FRC). All the records in GAD have been accessioned into the National Archives, and eventually both its records and staff will be transferred to a new depository to be built near the National Archives building. Almost all of the records on Korea in GAD are military. In 1956, when the Departmental Records Branch of the Adjutant General's Office was terminated, its facilities, most of its staff, and the records in its custody became part of NARS. In 1968, the records from the Departmental Records Branch that had not already been transferred to the National Archives building were moved to the new Federal Records Center. Soon after this move the enormous volume of records of U.S. Army commands for the World War II-Korean War period, which were in the Kansas City Federal Records Center, were moved to the Washington National Records Center and became part of GAD.

The records transferred from the Departmental Records Branch had



adequate finding aids, but more than 25,000 FRC boxes received from Kansas City did not. In the last eight years little has been done to improve the situation, and the usefulness of what finding aids there are, consisting of cards or army shipping forms giving often outdated contents and box numbers, has deteriorated. There is hope, however. The GAD staff has grown over the last two years, and although the process of inventorying these records will take many years, it has begun.

*Records of the United States Army Forces in Korea, 1945-49*

All U.S. forces in the occupation of Korea were subordinate to one command and one man, USAFIK and General Hodge. Hodge was also the commander of the Twenty-fourth Corps, the U.S. tactical command in Korea, and directed civil government in Korea through his deputy, the military governor of Korea, who was also the commander of the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK). Thus, there were basically two subdivisions of USAFIK, the Twenty-fourth Corps for managing the military and USAMGIK for the civil functions of the occupation. Although this division by function should be reflected in the existing records of USAFIK, it, unfortunately, is not.

There are approximately 10,000 FRC boxes in GAD documenting the history of the occupation of Japan and an additional 3,000 documenting the U.S. military in Japan during this period. There is a similar volume and division of records for the occupation of the U.S. zone in Germany. No discrete body of records, however, has yet been located in the National Archives that can be described as the records of the USAMGIK. Of course, the occupation of Korea was for a shorter period of time, involved smaller forces, and was conducted at a much lower level in the military chain of command than the occupations of Japan and Germany, but this does not adequately account for the large gap in the records.

There are approximately 180 FRC boxes currently shelved in GAD as either records of the Twenty-fourth Corps or USAFIK. At least a third of these pertains to the operations of the Twenty-fourth Corps before the occupation or are not historically significant files, should not have been preserved, and will eventually be destroyed. The most significant of these records consist of forty-six totally unindexed FRC boxes labeled as follows: Record Group 332, Records of U.S. Theaters of War, World War II, USAFIK, Twenty-fourth Corps, G-2, Historical Section.<sup>14</sup> These files were set up by Twenty-fourth Corps personnel during the occupation of Korea for the production of two lengthy

14. This designation will probably be changed at some future date to Record Group (hereafter RG) 338 (Records of U.S. Army Commands) once they are inventoried.

manuscripts that are now in the U.S. Army's Center of Military History in Washington, D.C.<sup>15</sup> The files themselves are of more interest than the histories of USAFIK and USAMGIK that they were used to produce. They are the most extensive available source of documents relating to the occupation of Korea. Dr C. Leonard Hoag described this collection in a manuscript prepared for the Center of Military History in 1970:

The richest source of materials . . . [is] the miscellaneous collections of papers of the XXIV Corps, USAFIK, and USAMGIK. These were originally contained in twenty-two file drawers as packaged in Korea, and are now dispersed in numbered boxes. . . . For convenience, they may be divided into five categories: 1) Administrative and Operations data of USAMGIK: General Orders, ordinances, Official Gazettes, Manuals of Organization and Operations, Weekly Reports, Proclamations, and Outgoing Messages. This collection is extensive but incomplete; 2) Brief, incomplete manuscript histories of the various departments and sections of USAMGIK with some supporting papers; 3) Folders and packages of supporting data for specific chapters of the three volume typescript "History of the United States Army Forces in Korea, . . ."; 4) "Historical Journal" (Information and Historical Section of USAFIK) which consists of thirteen loose-leaf notebooks with typed daily records of conferences, policy decisions, contemporary events, press data, on-the-spot interviews and analyses from 1945 to 1948; 5) Miscellaneous data on Korean personalities, North and South Korean press translations, as well as some reports from the 6th, 7th, and 40th Divisions to USAFIK.<sup>16</sup>

These records have been declassified and screened.

In his manuscript, Dr. Hoag expresses regret that "a potential major source, the Commanding General's File of General Hodge . . . has yet to be located as a separate file."<sup>17</sup> This statement no longer applies. General Hodge's correspondence file, consisting of approximately six inches of documentation, is part of an eighty FRC-box series of USAFIK files in GAD.<sup>18</sup> These files also include historical reports on various USAFIK operations (Yösu, Turkey Trot, and Gun Shot), the internal situation in South Korea, and Thirty-eighth-parallel incidents. Files for most of the sections of USAFIK headquarters appear to be included, but they are quite disorganized. Presently, the only way for a researcher to insure that all records pertinent to his interest are located is to examine every single box. This should not be as difficult as it might seem. The GAD staff, taking into consideration the uninventoried state of many of the

15. The two manuscripts are: USAFIK, Twenty-fourth Corps, G-2, Historical Section, "History of the United States Army Military Government in Korea, September 1945-30 June 1946," 3 vols., typescript, 1947; and "History of the United States Army Forces in Korea, 1945-1947," 3 vols., typescript, 1947.

16. Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea," pp. 476-77.

17. Ibid., p. 477.

18. Until these files are inventoried they can be most easily identified as RG 338, USAFIK, Unit 11071, boxes 1-36 (actually there are only 29 FRC boxes; some numbers are missing) and Unit 11070, boxes 67-126 (52 FRC boxes).



series of records in its custody, often feels obligated to go to the extreme of pulling large numbers of boxes and hauling them to the research room. In this case, however, these records must be reviewed for declassification before researchers can see them.

Certainly after thirty years almost all of the classified documents included in USAFIK files can and should be declassified and open to the public. The two principal reasons they are not are volume and priority. The volume of classified records in the National Archives awaiting review for declassification is enormous. Among them, based on researcher interest, the USAFIK files have been assigned a low priority in the declassification schedule. The Declassification Division of NARS did not plan on reviewing the eighty boxes of USAFIK files before 1979. At present, access to these records can only be obtained through EO 11652 or the FOIA.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Record Group 319*

*Records of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Intelligence Library File, 1944-54.* The Intelligence Library file in GAD consists of several records series. These include: the Army-Intelligence Project file, the Publications file, and the Intelligence Data (ID) Document file. Of these three, the Army-Intelligence Project file is the least significant. The "projects" are subjects under which the records are arranged according to the War Department decimal file system. About two boxes of records relating to Korea are in this file for the 1946-48 period; the same number exists for the 1949-50 period. Most of the documents in this file are of limited value, and many are simply cover letters once attached to documents that are now filed elsewhere. The project has not been reviewed for declassification.

The Publications file is a much utilized source of documents. Basically, it includes serialized reports received from U.S. Army, Air Force, and Navy commands and organizations, U.S. and Allied intelligence agencies, the State Department, and the private sector. Among the records in the 2,350 FRC boxes in this series are intelligence summaries created by USAFIK, the FEC, the U.S.-Korean Military Advisory Group, and the Twenty-fourth Corps; Allied Translator and Intelligence Service translations of both North and South Korean documents, and

19. Records requested under both the executive order and the FOIA must be adequately identified. NARS Declassification Division will review moderate volumes of records under EO 11652 that are only identified by organization and box number. Key boxes one might request be reviewed in the USAFIK files are: Unit 11070, boxes 67-68 (Hodge correspondence and reports on thirty-eighth-parallel incidents), and Unit 11071, boxes 2-9, 16-17 (Adjutant General's section reports and G-3 section operational reports).

research reports produced by the Central Intelligence Agency. The finding aid to this series of publications is an alphabetical card file. The records are also arranged alphabetically. The usefulness of this file is greatly enhanced by the simplicity of both the index and the arrangement of the records. This file has been reviewed for declassification and does not contain many records that require screening.

The finding aid to the ID Document file is easy to understand, but the file's actual usefulness is lessened by the present security classification of the index and the arrangement of the records. Apparently when the War Department created the Intelligence Library file, all incoming intelligence data were filed by subject, in the case of most serialized publications, or by ID numbers assigned in sequence as documents arrived from all over the world. As with the intelligence files of the Research and Analysis Branch of the OSS, each document in the ID Document file series stands alone and can only be located through a separate search.

The index cards to the ID file are arranged by country and thereunder by subject. Each of the 3,000 to 4,000 index cards in the file for Korea lists from one to ten documents. A card normally lists the agency and date of origin, and the subject of each document. Currently the ID documents are in 10,000 archive boxes shelved in the upper tier of a stack area, so a ladder must be used to retrieve them. Many of the documents are worth the time spent locating them. Some are easily recognizable as possibly the only existing copy of a significant report. Most, however, consist of either intelligence data in such raw form as to be indigestible, or of reports more easily available elsewhere. Often, only a cross-reference sheet to the Publications file, or worse still, a twenty-year old "charge-out" card is the result of a search.

Although there are probably very few cards in this entire index that should not be routinely declassified, the index has never been reviewed and all cards that could not be declassified removed. As for the security status of the ID documents, the Declassification Division has declassified approximately the first third of the entire file. All documents dated 1946, and many dated 1947, have been reviewed, but it will be years before the entire file can be reviewed. Before any ID documents can be released they must be carefully screened. The current GAD policy regarding access to the ID Document file is that a researcher may request documents relating to a topic, but only the reference staff has access to the index.

#### *Records Seized by U.S. Military Forces in Korea, 1921-52*

Probably the most valuable collection of records anywhere in the world outside of North Korea concerning its political, economic, and military activities during the 1945-50 period is in approximately 1,000



archive boxes in GAD. The research potential of these records for anyone interested in the study of almost any aspect of North Korean history is boundless. These records include correspondence, office files, personnel files, printed materials (both North and South Korean periodicals and newspapers), bulletins, and photographs relating to the government, the courts, and the army. Most of this collection appears to have been captured when the UN forces occupied P'yŏngyang during the Korean War. Annotated shipping lists briefly describing each document in the series provide an almost ideal index. These lists have been microfilmed and may be purchased from GAD. The records are not classified and do not need to be screened. The only possible problem that this body of material presents to the researcher is the absence of any translations. (The annotated lists are in English, but the seized records are in Korean).

#### *Record Group 407*

*Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Unit Historical File, 1941-48, and Occupied Area Reports, 1945-54.* GAD has 23,600 archive boxes of U.S. Army unit historical files for the years 1941-48. These records are arranged by unit and besides action reports, include daily journals, messages, and other files of the various sections of virtually every army organizational entity from entire theaters of operation to the smallest military police company. Although the bulk of the documentary materials contained in these files pertain to the actions of army units in World War II, there are some valuable documents concerning some of the units active in the occupation of Korea. For instance, the intelligence files of USAFIK, the Sixth Infantry Division, and the 971st Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment include significant reports of the unrest and rebellion that took place throughout South Korea in October and November 1948. These records are declassified, but some must be screened.

The Occupied Area Reports consist of 1,300 archive boxes of reports, intelligence summaries, directives, regulations, civil affairs handbooks, press releases, and other materials generated by U.S. military and State Department personnel who participated in American military governments. There are 120 boxes in this file that contain records of political, social, and economic affairs in Korea primarily between 1945 and 1949. Although most of this material has not been reviewed, it can easily be declassified. Screening of these records is usually unnecessary.

#### *U. S. Army Records*

*Record of the U.S. Army Forces Pacific, the Far East Command, and the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, 1945-52.* In April

1945, the Pacific war was approaching its final phase with the assault on the Japanese home islands. The JCS prepared for the last campaign in the Pacific by designating General MacArthur commander in chief of U.S. Army Forces in the Pacific (AFPAC), giving him control over all army and army-air force units for the invasion of Japan. On August 15, V-J Day, the AFPAC commander was given an additional post. As supreme commander for the Allied powers, MacArthur accepted the Japanese surrender and supervised the occupations of both Japan and Korea. In January 1947, in addition to his supremacy in army and occupational matters in the East and Southeast Asian area, MacArthur became the commander in chief in the Far East (CINCFE), and the AFPAC command became the FEC. As CINCFE, MacArthur had various degrees of responsibility for all army, navy, and air force commands in East and Southeast Asia.

The 3,000 FRC boxes of records of General Headquarters (GHQ), AFPAC/FEC, and the 10,000 FRC boxes of records of GHQ/SCAP are arranged as they were when they were submitted. Their arrangement reflects the complicated interrelated organizational structure of these two commands.

The records of GHQ, FEC, and AFPAC are filed together, and the records of their staff sections include many of the files of previous commands. The AFPAC/FEC records of interest to most researchers studying Korea are those of the G-2 (intelligence) and of the G-3 (operations) sections. Most of the AFPAC/FEC files have not been reviewed by the Declassification Division. Special reviews can be requested for small portions of the files under EO 11652. In this manner, the AFPAC/FEC daily *Intelligence Summaries* have been declassified through December 1950. Each daily summary consists of a small magazine-size publication summarizing the military, political, and economic situation in East and Southeast Asia. These summaries were compiled from intelligence reports received from military intelligence gathering units throughout the AFPAC/FEC area of responsibility. They contain estimates of the situation in North and South Korea.

The records of GHQ/SCAP should offer enormous research potential for the student of Korean history; unfortunately, however, they offer very little, and what they do offer is so dispersed throughout the files that it is not usually worth the trouble of searching for them. The Government Section of GHQ/SCAP was established on October 2, 1945, and from then until a reorganization in February 1947, the two divisions of the Government Section were the Public Administration Division, which supervised civil government in Japan, and the Korean Division, which "functioned as a rear echelon in Tokyo for United States Army Military Government in Korea, reported on military



government operations there, and expedited liaison between the Tokyo and Seoul headquarters."<sup>20</sup> In February 1947, the Korean Division was transferred to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, SCAP. Only seventeen FRC boxes of records for this office are included with the GHQ/SCAP files. The records of the Korean Division are not among them, and there does not appear to be any discrete body of records relating to military government in Korea in the SCAP records. Aside from the status and activities of the Korean minority in Japan, they are of limited interest to someone studying Korea. As one historian wrote, "The files of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers as located in Washington and MacArthur Memorial Library in Norfolk, Virginia, contain few records of major value on Korea which are not to be found in other Army files."<sup>21</sup> Most of the SCAP files have been reviewed for declassification, but they must sometimes be screened before they can be made available.

#### CONCLUSION

The Carter administration is currently considering an executive order that will eventually accelerate the declassification of records in the National Archives. This order, however, will not significantly affect the accessibility of records in the GAD relating to Korea, 1945-50. Long before the Declassification Division can expand its staff and accelerate its program, virtually all of the records in the GAD discussed in this paper will have been reviewed and declassified. But declassification of the records is not necessarily going to make them accessible. First they must be inventoried, and this is a much more difficult and time-consuming task than declassification. Moreover, after records are declassified, arranged, and inventoried, they often cannot be made available until they have been screened.

During the past several years the work load of the GAD reference staff has increased such that it threatens the quality of reference service. The project staff has expanded over the last two years to remedy this, and the situation should improve. As inventories are prepared, important records bearing on Korean-American relations will undoubtedly be discovered. The files of USAMGIK or the Korean Division of SCAP may even be located.

20. U.S. Department of War, GHQ, SCAP, and FEC, "Selected Data on the Occupation of Japan, Organization and Activities of General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers and the Far East Command," (Tokyo, n.d., [probably 1950]), p. 174.

21. Hoag, "American Military Government in Korea," p. 478.

## Contributors

BARTON BERNSTEIN is Professor of History at Stanford University. He has written numerous articles on the Korean War, the Truman-MacArthur controversy, the ending of the Pacific War, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He is the editor of several volumes, including *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (Vintage).

BRUCE CUMINGS is Associate Professor of International Studies at the University of Washington. He is the author of several articles on Korean politics, Chinese foreign policy, and American foreign policy, as well as *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton).

LLOYD GARDNER is Professor of History at Rutgers University. His many publications include *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Wisconsin) and *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949* (Quadrangle).

JON HALLIDAY is on the editorial board of *New Left Review* and is the author of numerous publications on Korea and Japan, including *A Political History of Japanese Capitalism* (Pantheon).

JOHN KOTCH received his Ph.D. from Columbia University. During the 1976 presidential campaign he served as Coordinator of the Carter Foreign Policy and Defense Task Force. He is the author of several articles on U.S. policy toward Korea, as well as *From White Plains to Plains: A Campaign Odyssey*.

JAMES MATRAY is Assistant Professor of History at New Mexico State University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in 1977 with a doctoral dissertation entitled, "The Reluctant Crusade:



American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950." He is the author of "Captive of the Cold War: The Decision to Divide Korea at the 38th Parallel," *Pacific Historical Review* (1981), and "Truman's Plan for Victory," *Journal of American History* (September 1979), which won the Stuart L. Bernath Award.

JOHN MERRILL is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Lafayette College. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Delaware, and he is the author of several articles, including "The Cheju-do Rebellion," *Journal of Korean Studies* (1980).

MARK PAUL did graduate work at Stanford University, was an editor at *Inquiry Magazine*, and now is on the editorial board of the *Oakland Tribune*.

STEPHEN PELZ is Associate Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts. He is the author of *Race to Pearl Harbor* (Harvard) and, most recently, "John F. Kennedy's 1961 Vietnam Decisions," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (1981).

JOHN SAUNDERS served in the U.S. Peace Corps in Korea and is currently an archivist with the National Records Center.

WILLIAM STUECK is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Georgia. He received his Ph.D. from Brown University, and he is the author of *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (North Carolina).

## Index

- Acheson, Dean: and march into North Korea, 197-200, 206-8, 210-12, 214-19, 226-37; and policy toward ending the Korean War, 264-67, 269, 271, 274, 277, 279-83, 286, 288-89, 295, 299-306; and U.S. policy, 8, 21, 29n, 31-33, 37-38, 42, 44-50, 61-66, 101-2, 111, 112, 119-32, 153, 155, 168, 173, 175, 193
- Air Force, U.S., and the Korean War, 265, 269, 271-72, 291, 293-95, 298
- Allison, John, 52, 176, 197-200, 216
- Ambrose, Stephen, 57, 62
- Armistice in Korean War, 245-56, 258, 262-76, 288, 298
- Armistice line, disputes over, 268-72
- Army, U.S. Department of: position on the march into North Korea, 196, 202; position on Korea, 107, 179, 181, 183, 185-86, 189
- Arnold, Archibald V., 19
- Atlantic Charter, 97
- Atomic bomb: possible use of, in Korea, 53, 290, 291, 307; and Soviet entry into Pacific War, 72-75, 77, 79-81, 85, 91
- Austin, Warren, 180, 215
- Ayers, Eben, 110, 114
- Bao Dai, 124
- Barnett, Edward, 224
- Benninghoff, H. Merrell, 12, 13
- Bishop, Max, 25-26, 29, 58
- Blockade, of China, 289, 291
- Boatner, Haydon, 286, 306
- Bombing by U.S. Air Force: of North Korea, 292-96, 298, 306; threats to China, 290-92, 295-96; of Yalu River power complex, 291, 292, 294. *See also* Civilian casualties
- Bonesteel, Charles H., 89
- Borton, Hugh, 12, 13, 25
- Bradley, Omar N., 111, 128, 202, 220-21, 224, 289-90, 302
- Bridges, Styles, 122, 124, 125
- Briggs, Ellis, 240, 242, 244, 247-48, 251
- Bunce, Arthur, 28
- Bureaucratic politics and foreign policy, 95
- Burgess, Guy, 50
- Butterworth, W. Walton, 181, 217-18
- Byrnes, James F., 78-80, 82-87, 89, 103-6, 108-9
- Cairo Conference, 1943, 12, 98-99
- Central Intelligence Agency, U.S., 26, 31-32, 34, 52, 118-19, 130; and Chinese entry into Korean War, 225-26
- Chiang K'ai-shek, 60, 63, 64, 69, 71-72, 76, 82, 84, 88, 90, 98, 99, 109, 112, 121-22, 126-27, 146, 148, 175, 190, 192, 201, 232-35, 284-85, 295
- Ch'oe Yŏng-gŏn, 27
- Cho Man-sik, 108, 154
- Chou En-lai, 211-12, 222, 224, 294
- China, People's Republic of: entry into Korean War, 197-200, 203-20, 222-33, 236; impact on ending of Korean War, 262-67, 269-72, 274-75, 278, 281, 284, 287-89, 293-96, 301-5; impact on Korea, 25, 32,



- 34, 39, 40-42, 120, 190; reasons for entry, 197-98, 209-12, 219-20, 224, 226-27, 232-34; withdrawal of troops from Korea, 244, 247-49, 252-55
- China, Republic of (Nationalist), 27, 76-78, 82-84, 89, 98, 120-22.  
*See also* Taiwan
- Chinese civil war, Korean forces fighting in, 39-40, 54, 155
- Churchill, Winston, 12, 69, 73, 81, 97, 99, 288-90, 292
- Chu Teh, 88
- Civilian casualties in U.S. bombing of North Korea, 269, 270, 293-96, 301, 306
- Civil war in Korea, 136-56; stages in development of, 138-40, 157-62
- Clark, Mark, 239, 241-54, 256, 292-93, 295, 298-99
- Clifford, Clark, 18, 127
- Clubb, O. Edmund, 52, 212, 217, 224-25
- Collins, J. Lawton, 196-97, 202-3, 221, 224, 240, 244-45, 251, 272, 276
- Communism: in Korea, 14, 16, 22, 25, 136-45; and left wing under U.S. Occupation, 107, 110
- Conant, James B., 113-14
- Condon, Edward, 120
- Congress, U.S.: and march into North Korea, 213-14; and policy regarding Korea, 1947-50, 175-77, 181-82, 186-87, 191, 193
- Connally, Tom, 126, 129, 130
- Constabulary, South Korea, 143
- Containment policy: *de facto*, 15, 16-25, 34, 35, 43; in Korea, 16-26, 29-33, 37, 47, 49-50, 53, 55, 172-77, 184, 186, 192-93; in U.S. global strategy, 4-5, 7-9, 18, 23, 110
- Cooper, John Sherman, 125
- Counterinsurgency, in South Korea, 153-55
- Crabapple, withdrawal code-named, 185
- Dallek, Robert, 58, 98
- Davies, John Paton, 30, 205-6, 225, 230-31, 233
- Decision-making theory, 94-97; and Korean War, 94, 96-97, 111-12, 131-32
- Defense Department, U.S., 111; and march into North Korea, 200, 202-3, 207, 218, 222, 231-32
- Defense perimeter in U.S. policy, 46
- Democratic Front for the Unification of the Fatherland, 146, 151-52, 157
- Dening, M. E., 61-62
- Dewey, Thomas, 126
- Diplomatic Branch, U.S. National Archives, 316-19
- Domestic politics, U.S.: and Korean War, 120-24, 127, 129-31, 297, 298, 304-6; and march into North Korea, 228-29, 234, 236
- Draper, William, 181-83, 186, 189
- Drumwright, Everett, 61, 62
- Dulles, John Foster, 4, 8, 33, 38, 49-51, 55, 64, 125-27, 129, 236, 240, 242, 247-50, 253, 257, 259, 307
- Economic Cooperation Administration, 26, 37, 185-87, 191
- Eddleman, Clyde, 244-46
- Eden, Anthony, 12
- Eisenhower, Dwight D., 119, 239-40, 244-48, 255, 295, 299, 303, 307
- Eisenhower administration: policy on Korea, 239-40, 242, 244, 307; policy on peace negotiations, 239-40, 242-44; policy on peace treaty, 245-50, 253-59
- Elections in South Korea: in 1948, 139-42, 181, 184; in 1950, 155-56; underground elections, 142, 143, 165
- Emmerson, John K., 205-6
- Fechteler, William, 282
- Feis, Herbert, 50, 197, 199
- Foreign Ministers' Conference in Moscow, 16-17, 108-9
- Formosa. *See* Taiwan
- Forrestal, James, 71-73, 82, 87, 102, 115, 176

- Fuchs, Klaus, 120
- Gaddis, John Lewis, 235
- General Order no. One, 88-90
- Geneva Convention and prisoner-of-war issue, 274, 276-81
- George, Walter, 61
- Gleason, Everett, 245
- "Grand area" and U.S. global policy, 6
- Great Britain, 61, 76, 89; and ending of Korean War, 263, 267, 281, 287-90, 292, 303-4; and Korean War, 198, 208, 227, 230
- Grew, Joseph C., 71-75
- Gross, Ernest, 303
- Groves, Leslie R., 113
- Guerrillas, Cheju Island, 22, 53, 137, 139, 141-45, 151, 154; Chiri Mountains, 144, 151, 153-54; all South Korea, 22, 39, 58, 136-42, 147-48, 152-55
- Gupta, Karunakar, 134, 150, 168
- Haeju Conference, 139, 165
- Hallinan, Vincent, 297-98
- Harriman, Averell, 15, 19, 69-82, 84-87, 101, 131
- Hartz, Louis, 10
- Henderson, Gregory, 136
- Henderson, Loy, 210
- Herter, Christian, 64-65
- Hiss, Alger, 12-13, 120, 123
- Ho Chi Minh, 124
- Hodge, John Reed, 14-17, 19-20, 22n, 25, 27n, 179, 184-85
- Hoffman, Paul, 186-87
- Hoover, Herbert, 121
- Hopkins, Harry, 67, 75-77, 98, 103-4; discussions with Stalin, 76-77, 103-4
- Horim (Forest tiger) unit, 147
- Hull, John, 281-82
- Hurley, Patrick, 67, 71, 109
- Inch'on landing, 207-9, 219, 223, 229
- India: and ending of Korean War, 294, 301, 302, 304-5; and Korean War, 198, 205, 210, 215-16, 221, 229
- Inspections (mutual), and ending of Korean War, 272-73
- Intelligence, U.S., G-2 archival materials, 322-23
- Internationalism: and U.S. global policy, 5-7, 21-22; and U.S. Korea policy, 11-13
- Iriye, Akira, 60
- Jacobs, Joseph, 184
- Japan and U.S. Asian policy, 19, 23-26, 34-37, 46, 59-60, 62
- "Japan Lobby," 24, 26, 36-37
- Jenner, William E., 129-30, 280, 297
- Jessup, Philip C., 119-20, 123
- Johnson, Louis, 32, 102, 115-16, 126-29, 131, 218, 232, 237
- Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 236
- Johnson, U. Alexis, 212, 217, 245, 281, 282
- Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S.: archival materials, 310-12; and Korea policy, 1947-50, 19, 20, 30, 31, 70, 87, 90, 107, 111, 112, 115, 128; and Korean War fighting, 174, 178, 182, 185, 189, 197, 201-4, 207, 218-27, 231-32; and peace negotiations, 241-43, 265, 268-69, 270-72, 276, 278, 281, 291-92, 294, 297-99
- Joy, C. Turner, 268, 270-71, 278, 281, 284-87
- Judd, Walter, 254
- Kangdong Political Institute, 152
- Kapsan faction in North Korean politics, 108
- Kennan, George: and Cold War, 7, 8, 23-24; and march into North Korea, 197, 200, 205, 217; and U.S. Asian policy, 15, 17, 23-26, 30-31, 36-37, 45-46, 50, 52, 57-58, 60, 69, 70, 110; and U.S. policy on ending the war, 264, 294, 297
- Kennedy, John F., 236
- Khrushchev, Nikita, 151, 154, 213-14
- Kim Ch'ang-sun, 160
- Kim Ch'om-g'on, 160
- Kim Il Sung, 25, 27, 38-39, 48-49, 55, 65, 108, 133-34, 151, 153, 155, 167
- Kim Ku, 15, 27, 98, 108, 151
- Kim Nam-sik, 160



Kim Sam-gyu, 160  
 Kim Sam-yong, 154  
 Kim Tal-sam, 152-53  
 Kim Tong-gil, 133  
 Kim Tu-bong, 155  
 Kirk, Allen, 65, 66, 211  
 Knowland, William F., 121-22, 129, 250, 254  
 Korea and U.S. security, 3, 11-13, 20, 23, 26, 30-34, 60, 63, 68, 77-79, 81-89, 96, 98, 103-6, 111, 169-74, 176, 178-79, 192-93, 227  
 Korea, Democratic People's Republic of (North Korea), 188, 192, 205, 207, 215; and end of Korean War, 262, 264, 269, 271-72, 274-75, 278, 281, 284, 287, 293, 294, 304-6; march into, by United Nations forces, 195-237; people's army in, 39-41, 118, 155  
 Korean-American security relationship, 239-59  
 Korean decision, June 1950, 111, 118-20, 124-32  
 Korean Democratic Party, 22  
 Korean Military Advisory Group, U.S., 42, 43, 148-50  
 Korean People's Republic, 107-8  
 Koreans in Chinese civil war, 39-40, 54, 155  
 Korean War, theories on origins of, 133-36, 157-62  
 Korea, Republic of (South Korea), 15, 22, 186-92, 204-5, 207, 216; armed forces in, 118-19; and ending of Korean War, 239-59, 262, 275  
 Kuomintang (KMT), 59, 77, *See also* China, Republic of  
 Kwantung Army, 70  
 Labor strife in South Korea, 140  
 Lansing, Robert, 125  
 Lawton, Frederick, 175  
 Leahy, William, 87, 183  
 Lee Yong-woon, 149  
 Left wing in South Korea, 53, 54. *See also* Communism  
 Lerch, Archer, 108-9  
 Lie, Trygve, 215, 267

Lilienthal, David E., 114  
 Lovett, Robert, 176-77, 185-88, 276-78, 281-82, 292, 296, 298, 302  
 MacArthur, Douglas, 29, 88, 90, 107, 117, 121, 126-29, 131, 187, 189, 191, 290, 295; and Inch'on landing, 53; and march into North Korea, 196, 202-4, 207, 212, 217-28, 231-35; and rollback current, 9, 10n, 39, 41-42, 49-51, 53, 55  
 McCarthy, Joseph R., 123-25, 127, 129-30, 233-34  
 McCarthyism and Korean War, 113, 120, 123-25, 129  
 McClelland, Charles, 138, 163  
 McCloy, John, 15, 72  
 McClure, Robert A., 276  
 McCormack, John A., 130  
 Malik, Jacob, 264, 265, 269  
 Malone, George W., 129  
 Manchuria: and Korean War, 201, 204, 210, 211, 218-19, 224-25, 230; and U.S. policy, 23, 26, 27, 36-37, 59, 61, 77-90, 100  
 Mao Tse-tung, 27, 122, 219, 232-35  
 Marshall, Charles Burton, 280  
 Marshall, George C., 81, 86, 110, 174, 177, 181, 184, 186, 188, 201, 218-21, 232, 235, 237, 266  
 Marshall Mission, 59-60  
 Masao, Okonogi, 160  
 Mathews, H. Freeman, 245  
 May, Ernest, 127  
 Menon, V. K. Krishna, 301-5  
 Merchant, Livingston, 212, 217  
 Mexico and ending of Korean War, 297-300  
 Military departments, U.S.: position on Korea, 14, 20-24, 26, 30-31, 60, 179-81. *See also* individual military departments  
 Military expenditures by Truman administration, 115-17  
 Modern Military Branch, U.S. National Archives, 310-16  
 Molotov, Vyacheslav, 13, 83, 174, 176-77  
 Muccio, John, 25, 28, 31, 38, 43, 149, 185-86, 191, 197, 285  
 Mu Ch'ng, 40, 167

Murphy, Charles, 220  
 Murphy, Robert, 240, 244, 246, 251  
 Nash, Frank, 245  
 National Archives documents, U.S., 309-26  
 National Guidance Alliance, 153-54  
 National Security Council, U.S. 26, 32, 45, 102, 115, 132, 190; and march into North Korea, 197-98, 203-4, 226-29; and security treaty, 245  
 National Security Council decision memoranda: no. 8, 24, 26, 29, 111, 182, 185, 190-92; no. 48, 32-38, 43, 45, 47, 52; no. 68, 8, 32-35, 38, 47, 49, 124, 198; no. 81, 203-5  
 Nitze, Paul, 196-99, 218-19, 298  
 Nixon, Richard, 9  
 Nolting, Frederick, 245  
 Office of Strategic Services, archival materials of, 315-16  
 Offtackle war plan, 116  
 Oliver, Robert, 43  
 O'Mahoney, Joseph C., 130-31  
 Open door: and internationalist current, 6-7; in Manchuria, 78-79, 81, 85  
 Operation Everready, 244-47, 249-52, 257. *See also* Rhee, Syngman  
 Pace, Frank, 128  
 Pacific Pact, 145-46  
 Paek In-yŏp, 149  
 Paek Sŏn-yŏp, 245, 249, 252  
 Pak Hŏn-yŏng, 140, 142, 151, 153, 157-60, 167  
 Pak Kap-dong, 160  
 Pannikar, K.M., 210-12, 229  
 Patterson, Robert, 18, 20, 110, 172-73, 176  
 Peace negotiations in Korean War, 239, 241-42, 244, 250, 261-79  
 Philby, Kim, 50  
 Police action in Korea, 30  
 Policy Planning Staff, U.S., 23, 30-32, 52, 178, 196, 198, 200, 205, 230, 279-80, 298  
 Polk, James K., 64  
 "Positive action," *See* Rollback current

Potsdam Conference, 13-14, 16, 77-81, 83-86, 102, 104  
 Prisoners-of-war: as issue in the ending of Korean War, 249-51, 262, 267, 272-88, 293, 296-98, 300-302, 304-7; release of by Syngman Rhee, 249-51, 262  
 Pyun, Y. T., 240-42, 247  
 Radford, Arthur W., 291  
 Rau, Sir Benegal, 215  
 Rees, David, 223  
 Remington, William, 124  
 Republican Party and the Korean decision, 120-24, 127, 129-31. *See also* Domestic politics  
 Reston, James, 207  
 Rhee, Syngman (Yi Sŏng-man), 15, 22, 24, 25, 27-29, 57, 63, 108, 112, 118, 130, 133-34, 139, 143-46, 154-59, 165-66, 186-87, 196; and ending of Korean War, 240-41, 243-59, 284; and march into North Korea, 196, 216; possible coup against, 240, 244-47, 249-52, 257; and rollback current, 27, 145. *See also* Operation Everready  
 Ridgway, Matthew, 263-77, 281, 284-85, 291  
 Roberts, W. L., 29n, 119, 146, 148, 150, 166  
 Robertson, Walter, 240, 244, 248, 251-57  
 Rollback current, 4-5, 9-11, 26-27, 29-38, 43, 47, 49-53, 55, 63-64  
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano: and decision-making, 97-102; policy toward Korea, 4-7, 11-13, 58-59, 98-100, 132; and trusteeship, 97-100; and U.S.S.R., 67-71, 74-75  
 Roosevelt, Theodore, 24  
 Ross, Charles, 106  
 Royall, Kenneth, 28  
 Rusk, Dean, 13, 33n, 89, 126-27; and march into North Korea, 199, 205-6, 212, 216-17, 220-21, 229, 236  
 Russell, Richard B., 130  
 Saltzman, Charles, 187-88  
 "Satisficing," 95-98, 100-101, 111, 132



Schaller, Michael, 58  
 Sevaireid, Eric, 210-11  
 Sherman, Forrest, 202  
 Sherwin, Martin, 58  
 Simon, Herbert, 95  
 Smith, Alexander H., 121  
 Smith, Harold D., 106  
 Smith, Walter Bedell, 176, 254  
 Snyder, John 282  
 Soong, T. V., 78-82, 85-87  
 South Korean Labor Party (SKLP), 139-41, 151-54, 158-61  
 Soviet-Koreans, 108  
 Soviet Union: and ending of Korean War, 263-67, 270, 272-73, 288-89, 294, 301-5; entry into war against Japan, 70-79, 81-84, 86-88; and North Korea, 40-42, 58, 60, 68-70, 118, 133, 151, 155; policy toward Korea, 13, 16, 77-82, 85, 86, 89, 99, 110; policy toward Korea during Korean War, 54-55, 57, 174-76, 180, 185-86, 189-90, 197-201, 207-8, 211, 213-14, 219, 224, 230-31; possible entry of Soviet forces into Korean War, 200-10, 211, 213, 215, 219-20, 231; and U.S. policy, 6-12, 18-19, 23-25, 31, 33-35, 42, 44, 50, 58-60, 63, 65-86, 88-91, 116, 122; withdrawal of troops from Korea, 180, 189  
 Stalin, J. V. 12-13, 38, 48, 51, 55-56, 59, 68, 70, 73, 74-90, 98-105, 108-10, 122, 124, 130, 133, 151, 170, 176, 178, 186, 214, 307  
 State-Army-Navy Coordinating Committee (SANACC), 180, 182  
 State Department, U.S.: archival materials of, 316-19; position on Korea, 3, 12-15, 60, 76, 77, 100, 107, 110-11, 170, 173, 175, 176, 181, 183, 185-86, 190; position on march into North Korea, 196-97, 201, 203-6, 210, 212, 218, 222-23, 226, 229, 230-31, 234; position on security treaty and ending of the Korean War, 245, 246, 278-81, 297, 299  
 State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), 13, 21, 87-89, 107, 122-24, 176, 178

Stelle, Frank, 279-80, 285  
 Stettinius, Edward R., 59  
 Stevens, Francis, 178  
 Stimson, Henry, 59, 71-75, 77, 79-83, 87  
 Stuart, J. Leighton, 190  
 Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP), archival materials of, 324-26  
 Taft, Robert A., 121-23, 129, 131  
 Taiwan: and ending of Korean War, 265; and Korean War, 198, 207, 209-11, 229, 233, 235; and U.S. policy, 26, 30-34, 37, 42, 46, 47, 64-65, 121-23, 126, 127, 129, 131  
 Taylor, Maxwell, 249, 256  
 Teheran Conference, 98-99  
 Thirty-eighth parallel: decision on, 13, 30, 88-91, 104-5; military clashes along, 137-39, 145-50, 155, 166  
 Thomas, Elbert, 61  
 Treaty of mutual defense between U.S. and R.O.K., 240-50, 253-59  
 Truman, Harry S.: and atomic deterrence, 113-18; and decision-making, 100-106, 111-12, 118-19, 125-31; and ending of Korean War, 262-64, 268-85, 288-307; and march into North Korea, 196-97, 209, 220-21, 225, 228, 230, 232-35, 237; and policy toward Korea, 4, 5, 7, 13, 17, 24, 32, 45, 51, 57, 59-61, 68-71, 73, 75-91, 100-105, 108-12, 118-19, 122-32, 169-86, 188-93  
 Truman, Margaret, 128  
 Truman Doctrine and Korea, 7, 18, 26, 32, 61, 172  
 Trusteeship in U.S. policy, 4, 6, 11-13, 15, 16, 57-60, 68, 76-80, 98-100, 103-10  
 Twinborn, operation code-named, 189  
 Tydings, Millard, 123-24, 127

Ulam, Adam, 215  
 Uprisings in South Korea, 136, 140-44, 166  
 United Nations: and ending of Korean War, 244, 247, 249, 254, 258, 259, 265, 267, 301-2; and Korean War, 196-99, 205-12, 215, 229, 230; and U.S. Korea policy, 4, 6, 8, 17-

22, 24, 28, 30-31, 45-47, 57-60, 63, 110, 112, 128, 176-77, 180-81, 185, 189, 191  
 United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), 22, 136-37, 140, 147, 177, 184  
 United States Armed Forces in Korea (USAFIK): archival materials of, 320-22; withdrawal of U.S. armed forces from Korea, 22-24, 27-30, 169-71, 181-85, 188-91, 192  
 United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), archival materials of, 321-22  
 United States-Soviet Joint Commission on Korea, 17, 21, 109-10, 171, 175-76  
 Vandenberg, Arthur, 109, 120-21, 175  
 Vandenberg, Hoyt, 117, 196-97, 202-3, 265, 282, 290, 292  
 Van Fleet, James, 285  
 Vietnam, comparison of, with Korea, 53-54  
 Vincent, John Carter, 12-16, 22, 25, 53, 59, 174  
 Vyshinsky, Andrei, 207-8, 302, 304-5

Wake Island meeting, 219-22, 224  
 Wallerstein, Immanuel, 36  
 Ward, Angus, 212  
 War Department, U.S., position of, on Korea, 20, 107, 111, 171-73  
 Webb, James, 212  
 Wedemeyer, Albert, 22n, 179  
 Wedemeyer mission, archival materials of, 318-19  
 Weyland, O. P., 291  
 Wherry, Kenneth, 123  
 Wiley, Alexander, 255  
 Wilkinson, James R., 209  
 Willoughby, Charles, 41, 224, 230  
 Wilson, Charles, 240  
 Wilson, Woodrow, 66  
 Yalta Conference, agreements at, 66-72, 74, 77-80, 85, 100, 102, 104  
 Yenan group in North Korea, 108  
 Yi Ch'ŏng-ch'ŏn, 27  
 Yi Chu-ha, 154  
 Yi Ho-jae, 152, 153  
 Yi Pŏm-sŏk, 27  
 Yŏsu-Sunch'ŏn rebellion, 136-38, 143-47, 188  
 Young, Kenneth, 245, 255



